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# Sight as Trauma: The Politics of Performing and Viewing the Body on Stage

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*Dedicated to my gran*



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*Abstract*

My thesis aims to partake in the controversial and theoretical debates surrounding sight which can be traced as far back as Plato. It seeks to provide an overview of the cultural history of the gaze in order to set up a triangulated and in-depth schema or triadic relationship between theatre, text and trauma through the lens of psychoanalytical, phenomenological and socio-theoretical frameworks. More specifically, it attempts to explore the various interactions, along the axis of representation, between theatrical metaphors and those of traumatic vision, as well as traumatic representations on stage of viewing and the multi-layered and socio-political implications of various ways of looking (or non-looking), which often trigger traumatic responses.

By examining two canonical plays – Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* and Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* – as well as the modern performances of artists such as Orlan and Franko B, I hope to show how visual trauma can transcend time and space and how the stage, as well as dramatic performances, can function as a body or body politic upon which various visuo-spatial and traumatic themes can be inscribed and re(enacted). The shift in emphasis, beginning with Freud and onwards, from physical to psychological trauma has often led to a blurring and obfuscation of the question of sight and the various lines of inquiry related to it. It has unfortunately often been overlooked in trauma theory, together with the issue of how certain sights/sites can often lead to broken, baffled and even traumatic responses when there is a failure to adequately interrogate, interpret and subsequently assimilate various events both on and off-stage.

This failure is further compounded by various theoretical strands which view trauma as being non-representable. Thus by bringing trauma and vision to the fore, my research aims to inflect the cultural history of the gaze by showing how it contributes invaluablely to a greater understanding of identity formation and hermeneutical activity in particular, as well as theatrical practices and even gender discourse analysis in general. By recourse to Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, two canonical plays which draw heavily on notions of sight, blindness and the traumatic implications of viewing certain objects or events, as well as through an interrogation of various responses to the theatrical performances of more modern bodily-based performance artists such as Orlan and Franko B, who cut and refashion their bodies in front of a large audience, this work seeks to bring together various theoretical approaches ranging from psychoanalysis to phenomenology in order to shed light on how sight can lead to trauma both on and off the stage, thus contributing to the ongoing theoretical debates surrounding the body and the theatre.

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## Introduction

### *The gaze as motif*

The question of the gaze has occupied a central position in both Western literature and philosophy since ancient times.<sup>1</sup> René Descartes calls sight ‘the most comprehensive and noblest of [the senses]’ (65), whilst in his *Passion and Excess: Blanchot, Bataille, and Literary Theory* Stephen Shaviro points out: ‘Nothing is more important to Western tradition than the clarity and truth of vision’ (5). There has been a repeated preoccupation with the interrelationships between vision, knowledge and perception, a preoccupation which can be traced as far back as classical Greece. Plato, for example, creates an analogy between the sun, as a bearer of light, and the human eye. In *Timaeus* he remarks that vision is the greatest blessing or boon to have been bestowed upon mankind (47b).

Preoccupations with sight can be evidenced in Ancient Greek theatre as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. As Martin Jay points out in *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, Greek art idealised the visible form and this ‘accorded well with their love of theatrical performance’ (23). Indeed, the etymological linkage between *theatre* and *theory*, which meant ‘to look at attentively,’ has often been remarked in the literature.

Since the Greek gods and goddesses were visible entities, religious effigies, sculptures and temples were created to honour them. It is perhaps this privileging of sight in classical Greece that is responsible for a trickling down effect into numerous religious systems which pay tribute to the sun, sun gods and the all-seeing eye. In medieval and early modern times, ‘the medieval metaphysics of light’ was ‘in large measure a religious adaptation of Platonic residues.’ Renaissance literature abounded

in ocular allusions. In France, for example, the powerful intersections between political authority, religion and sight could be traced in the lavish display of Louis XIV's processions and his extravagant interior decorations. Louis XIV, known as the Sun God, was – like Apollo – ‘the God-like source of all light and the eye that could see everything, a figure of specular identity *par excellence*’ (Jay 44, 89).<sup>2</sup> In Hegelian philosophy, the sun functions as the true source of illumination and even becomes a metaphor for philosophy itself.

Whilst the focus on the power of the eye, together with its physical, tangible materiality, was a staple of the Renaissance era, it was during the Enlightenment, and in the wake of the Cartesian dualism or mind/body split, that the notion of an ‘inner eye’ really came into its own. In his search for knowledge and clarity, and *via* deductive reasoning, Descartes turned to the notion of ‘ideas’ and how these can refer to inner, mental representations. Whilst the split between the mental idea of an object and its physical representation was certainly not a novel idea – Plato had already postulated the notion that material objects were merely imitations of an abstract or transcendent Idea or *Eidos* – Descartes’s dualism moves away from Plato by positing ideas as subjective entities rather than external realities. In Descartes, it is the mind that actually sees rather than the eye – hence the expression of seeing, almost literally, with ‘the mind’s eye.’

This notion of a representational mind was to be contested by the French philosopher Henri Bergson in the late nineteenth century: ‘We maintain that the brain is an instrument of action, and not of representation’ (qtd. in Jay 149). At the same time, Bergson moves away from what he deems a simplistic model of contemplative or reflective understanding and firmly grounds the body as the site and locus of action; the body is a lived body that moves freely in the world and has the capacity ‘to

be a vehicle of human choice' (193) even though it may not always be granted human agency. An implicit assumption that can be made from this, when it comes to the question of the gaze, is that the very act of looking (or non-looking) is an actual choice. Setting aside the fact that there are several different ways of looking, ranging from a sweeping glance to a concentrated stare, one may, in fact, wish to look *sideways*, for example, or to avert the gaze and/or concentrate one's scopic field elsewhere. This scopic field, as identified by the French phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, deftly ushers in the question of the other, the other's gaze, the Sartrean distinction between 'for-itself' and 'in-itself,' and the Lacanian split between the eye and the gaze, to which we shall now turn.

*The Eye/I and the Gaze of the Other*

In contrast to the liberties assigned to the Bergsonian subject, who may or may not choose to look at something freely, the existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre was more sceptical and sought to destabilize the hegemonic position of the Western tradition's linkage of the I/eye and the subject's assumed autonomy and power over vision. In *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (1943) Sartre posits that the subject is never really free in any real sense of the term since he is always becoming the object of another's gaze in a competitive exchange of gazes and intersubjective relationships. There is a non-reciprocity between the subject, or what Sartre calls the 'for-itself,' and the object or the 'in-itself,' in so far as they are caught up in a fundamental power struggle or antagonistic battle of wills. Instead of an autonomous subject, we now have a self constituted by, or even for, the other's gaze: 'First of all, I now exist as *myself* for my unreflective consciousness [and thus] I see

*myself* because *somebody* sees me (319). For Sartre, not even God himself can produce a totalizing view of the world.<sup>3</sup>

This is reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty's contention that the world itself was flesh, a flesh of history that could not be encompassed by the view of God because it was 'as unsurveyable as the flesh of the natural world' (Jay 319). However, in contradistinction to Sartre, Merleau-Ponty rejects 'being' and 'nothingness' and replaces these with the 'visible' and 'invisible.' He goes further than Sartre, since for him perception is prior to being, and posits in *The Visible and the Invisible* a universal or 'anonymous visibility' that inhabits all of us, a vision or visibility of the flesh in the here and now which 'radiat[es] everywhere and forever' (142).

This flesh of the world grounds the subject and object. Yet there is no radical split between the two viewing positions taken up between them. For Merleau-Ponty, even the subject is objectified because seeing is not seeing, 'to see the other is essentially to see my body as an object, so that the other's body object could have a psychic "side"' (225). In other words, it is this conflation of this other body within me that allows me to experience the other's experience.

This reference to the object's psychic side was taken up by Jacques Lacan, with his postulation of the desire for an *object a* or object of lack. The gaze itself is imaginary or a function of the desire for this object. Desire, in other words, is really the desire for the object. 'The gaze I encounter – you can find this in Sartre's own writing – is, not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other' (Lacan qtd. in Jay 362). For Lacan, there is an intersubjective exchange in which the subject mistakenly assumes that it can see itself seeing itself through the other's gaze.<sup>4</sup> In reality, the act of seeing comes after the state of being-looked-at-ness, a term I borrow from Laura Mulvey's *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975). 'Prior to

intersubjectivity, as it were, there is this uncanny sense of being looked at without being seen' (160). Thus there is a split between the eye and the gaze, the gaze belonging solely to the object itself.

Quite clearly, this imposes limits on the subject's field of vision in the scopic realm, as well as more general limits on the subject's ability to know something, limits which the cultural critic Slavoj Žižek will draw upon and delineate more clearly in his *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. As he points out by drawing on Lacan's concept of the imaginary self, the subject is alien to itself. It is a self which 'exists only on the basis of the misrecognition of its own conditions; it is the effect of this misrecognition' (68). This is reminiscent of Paul de Man's reading of Mallarmé's work in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, where he claims that hermeneutic understanding is never a complete process since there is a temporal disjuncture between understanding and history, which 'forever eludes totalization' (32). It is not a far cry from this to Foucault's assertions of the conjunctures and disjunctures in history.

It is the disjunctures between history and understanding which can explain, perhaps, Žižek's relegation of the subject to an almost alien position even within his own essentialist substance. He postulates that the subject in society is faced with what he paradoxically calls 'the forced choice of freedom' in which making a choice consists in making the right choice as dictated by the community to which the subject belongs. If the subject makes the wrong choice, he will 'lose the freedom of choice itself.' This is really Hobson's choice after all and the subject '*must choose what is already given to him*' (165, emphasis in original). This having to choose what is always *already* given clearly creates a temporal fissure between the effecting of the actual act and its historical materialization.

The limits on subjective knowledge are such that transgression, the abolition of the subject's 'misrecognition', necessarily exacts a high price, with access to knowledge leading to a 'loss of enjoyment' or *jouissance* – and even the subject's total loss of his very ontological consistency' (Žižek 68). Similarly, Shari Benstock notes in *Textualizing the Feminine: On the Limits of Genre* that *jouissance* 'exceeds the limits of any definition: it goes beyond sexual pleasure, beyond pleasure itself, and can tip over into pain and psychic dissolution' (16).

I read *jouissance* as a discharge of energy, an excessive pleasure or orgasmic bliss intimately linked with loss and even death.<sup>5</sup> As Lacan notes in *Écrits: A Selection* the body is capable of experiencing this *jouissance* through erogenous zones as loss. 'Thus the erectile organ comes to symbolize the place of *jouissance*, not in itself, or even in the form of an image, but as a part lacking in the desired image' (353).<sup>6</sup>

*Jouissance*, then, occurs at the crucial boundary between the body's surfaces or orifices and the outer world. It is that which lies beyond – beyond physical representations, and leaves behind its residual trace. In short, this residue of *jouissance* 'escapes representative forms' and 'signals (uncannily) the threshold where identity recedes, where subjectivity vanishes, where the sign and object are traversed' (Benstock 40).

This threshold or liminal space, where identity is lost and where 'sign and object are traversed,' is where the rupturing of signifier from signified occurs. In a similar vein, the psychoanalyst and literary critic Julia Kristeva posits a 'thetic phase,' a textual and psychical boundary which signals rupture and opens out onto desire. According to Kristeva, the thetic phase 'posits the gap between the signifier and the signified as an opening up toward every desire but also every act, including the very

jouissance that exceeds them' (*The Portable Kristeva* 42). This forecloses the single possibility of any stable one-to-one correspondence of signifier and signified, word and thing. Endowed with polysemy, this space of indeterminacy, marked as it is by its own liminality and transience, can provide a useful and strategic way to read texts, which are seen as opening out onto desire and exceeding representation. The 'eye' or eyes in the text resist closure under the subject's interpretative gaze and assimilative efforts to reach understanding. (I shall return to this idea of excessive jouissance in Chapter Four when examining the critical moment of Oedipus's self-blinding.)

For now, suffice it to say that desire is desire for the other and that this is intimately tied with the notion of the gaze – even scopophilia. In Western tradition especially the gaze is often identified as being masculine. This intuitive understanding also trickled down into psychoanalytic theory in the nineteenth century; it will be recalled that even for Freud, whose theories were not particularly conducive to the ocularcentric discourse, it is apparently the young boy who sees and what he 'sees' is that the girl lacks a penis, which is subsequently interpreted as a deficiency in her (or rather, there is 'nothing down there' for the curious boy to actually see). As we shall see later on, Laura Mulvey problematizes this clear-cut binary of male/female, viewer and viewed, while other feminist writers such as Jill Dolan (who posits a lesbian spectator), Rebecca Schneider, Elin Diamond, and many others, have also destabilized the neat distinctions between viewing and perception through their writing.

One major area where this has taken place is in theatre, where the associations between the specular representation of women and the erotic – often fetishistic – gaze of the male have been interrogated, pressured and in many cases subverted by feminist theorists with diligent and critical acuity.

*Theatre as spectacle and site of resistance*

All I describe is theatre even where theatre is not the subject.

(Barker 2)

We have already noted how theatre, theory and sight are etymologically linked. In Ancient Greece theatrical performances were grand, spectacular events which were part of religious festivals, symbolized Athenian democracy and involved the entire *polis* or city state in active participation. As Susan Bennett points out, ‘Greek theatre was also clearly inseparable from the social, economic, and political structures of Athens’ (2). The city itself actually became a theatre, ‘a space in which all the citizens were actors – as the city itself and its leading citizens were put on display’ (Goldhill qtd. in duBois 68). While such grand spectacles were effected to worship divinities, with the spectacular effect designed to create communal solidarity and augment the religious aspect of these festivals, Louis XIV’s lavishly extravagant train was designed as a spectacle which, through transfixing the gaze of the populace, invested power solely in the sovereign’s person. Queen Elizabeth’s grand court at Shakespeare’s theatre is another case in point.

Although it has been claimed by certain critics that there were no women in the Athenian audiences, this seems counterintuitive to the accepted claim that the theatrical performance involved the majority of the city. A more feasible claim would seem to be that women were excluded from the stage rather than from the actual auditorium. This tradition was handed down to later generations, as is evidenced in the well-known example of Shakespeare’s theatre in Elizabethan England, where only young, male actors could act on stage and perform female roles.<sup>7</sup>

In line with theatre’s etymological linkage to sight, and given the fact that the gaze is often viewed as masculine in Western theories of ocularcentrism, it seems

curious and surprising that feminist writers, critics and performance artists should have used the space of the theatre as a sight/site or medium of resistance to what Jay calls phallogocentric discourse. Yet women's glaring absence from the stage may have been the real prompt or trigger, instigating women to use the theatre in general and the theatrical space in particular as a powerful tool in their struggles of resistance against patriarchy.

Although antitheatrical tracts can be traced as far back as Plato, who thought one of the reasons that theatre was dangerous was because it effeminized men, it was still men who were the privileged actors in theatrical performances. Whilst certainly not being the major reason for Plato's distaste of the theatre, his notion of theatre's feminising capacities is part and parcel of the antitheatrical tradition. In his *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England* Stephen Orgel traces, *pace* Plato, this antitheatrical discourse by showing how several writers were afraid that theatre would lead to a kind of 'universal effeminization' and arouse homoerotic feelings or sexual licentiousness in its spectators (29).

Such deep-seated fears and anxieties attest to the influential power of theatre. It is this dynamic power perhaps which many feminists are taking advantage of in their theatrical performances. What further aids their project is the conduciveness of theatrical space to flexible, malleable representations.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the stage itself has often been represented as a feminine body, a tendency which has been resisted, incidentally, by critics such as Gilles Deleuze and Jean Baudrillard, who – indebted as they were to Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty and his depiction of a machinic body, the body without organs – view the body as a technological abstraction or semiotic system of signs, respectively – an argument to which I shall return.

By recourse to Plato's notion of the *chora* in his *Timaeus*, it is possible to view the theatrical stage as 'a labile and unstable notion with undeniable feminine and maternal resonances' (Bianchi 124).<sup>9</sup> It is a space which functions 'as a zone of creativity where dwelling, living, being *as becoming*, is always already taking place (142). According to Anne-Marie Smith-Di Biasio, there is a phantasmatic, dream-like quality to this *chora*, this 'mode of perception like dream, in which the image hovers phantom-like and transitional between reminiscence and existence, reminiscence of things past and the existence of the day's residues where it embeds itself' (217). In Kristevan terms, it is also a semiotic, almost prelinguistic space marked by its own motility and cadent rhythms which precede the Lacanian Symbolic or its laws of signification.<sup>10</sup> Hence the theatre can be viewed as a space which exists prior to language and representation.

In *Difference and Repetition* (1968) Deleuze in fact posits the existence of such a theatre in a dynamic model of the theatre as repetition, which 'is opposed to the theatre of representation just as movement is opposed to the concept and to representation which refers it back to the concept.' In such a theatre, nature and history come together in 'a language which speaks *before words*, with gestures which develop before organised bodies, with masks before faces, with spectres and phantoms before characters – the whole apparatus of repetition as a "terrible power"' (11-2, italics mine).

In *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and his collaborator Félix Guattari posit that such a theatre is opposed to that of representation through a psychiatric practice which they call *schizoanalysis*, which serves to destroy 'beliefs and representations, theatrical scenes' (314). Whilst such a theatre may seem antivisual, even antitheatrical, I would like to hold on to this idea of a theatre which

speaks ‘before’ words, since it illustrates Deleuze and Guattari’s attempts to move beyond representation – to shatter all representative forms – in the search for a mechanistic body of origins which is linked to the repetitive processes of its own desiring-production and ‘disengage[s] the deterritorialized flows of desire’ (314).

Interestingly, Kristeva’s semiotic can also be interpreted in this way. ‘Rather than [being] a system of signifiers,’ it can be read as ‘a system (a machine) of breaks-flows, constantly separating from and connecting with the machine(s) of the symbolic, continually grafting onto its body-parts their process of production.’ This would explain the irruption of *jouissance* in the thetic phase, as well as the inscription of this phase ‘within a logic of repetition and renewal’ (Margaroni 88).

Such a logic of repetition implicates desire and trauma in a mimetic reproduction of discourses – the constant search for origins which defies historicity – without grounding the body firmly in a materialized subjecthood. Unlike feminists such as Luce Irigaray, who reads Plato’s description of a cave/chora in his *The Republic* ‘as the womb, from which imprisoned men are led up to the sun of enlightenment by the philosophy tutor’ (Hodge 104), Kristeva resists the nostalgic urge to return the subject to his or her ontological, embodied consistency. There is no unified subject or unified history of the subject, despite Irigaray’s desirous attempts to posit a maternal womb as source of origins. Desire for this other/mother is mechanistic and remains *always already* deferred, constantly pointing to the traumatic and glaring gap between subject and object, origin and historicity, and the impossibility of suturing them.

Whilst this may be a source of *angst* for Irigaray, many feminist performers actually celebrate this suture, using it to create dramatic effects in theatrical performance and to show how the tension between the subject and object, the viewer

and the viewed, can heighten the theatrical experience. Anne Ubersfeld, for example, remarks that the desired object, desire itself, constantly eludes fixity of meaning or the subject's definitive grasp. If desire 'stop[s] and fix[es] on a particular object, then the role of spectator is relinquished, the theatrical experience denied' (Bennett 73).

In recent years, and especially after the 1960s, various lines of inquiry regarding sight (or the site of theatre) have also tried to take account of the performative and traumatic ramifications of viewing particular events, both on stage and in real life, and how the space of theatre can offer itself as a site of resistance or a powerful, political tool in its mediation of various ideologies. This is also tied to considerations regarding semiology, the aestheticization of theatre and the general issue of spectatorship and audience response.

#### *Aesthetics and the material body*

Although post-structuralists like Deleuze and Kristeva insist on the body as a *de*-materialized entity, it is difficult to do away with the physical and biological realities of the body, the Western metaphysics of presence. This is what led Herbert Blau to assert that, in contrast to all the other performing arts, it is the theatre which 'stinks most of mortality' (83). For the poet T.S. Eliot there is a concrete, actual body behind verse in Greek drama: 'Below the dialogue of Greek drama we are always conscious of a concrete visual actuality, and behind that of a specific emotional actuality' (qtd. in Shepherd and Wallis 30).

The body on stage, the performing body, is also a social body that is inscribed in its own historical and political moment. Additionally, there is a body who performs and a set of bodies who see and interpret the performance, either *via* recourse to empathy, identification or a kind of Brechtian distance from this performing body.<sup>11</sup>

For the psychoanalyst André Green, for example, it is the spectator's 'movement of identification with the hero (pity, compassion) and his masochistic movement (terror)' which compound his [*sic*] own pleasure (qtd. in Ellmann 53). Such subjective identification adds to the heightened theatrical effect.

In phenomenological terms, the audience have both an 'I' and a roving 'eye' which can detach itself from an objective and scientific gaze and perceive the world through a direct, lived experience with the physical environment. While Green is certainly not a phenomenologist – his work seems more indebted to Freudian analysis and Wilfred Bion's theory of projective identification than to anything else – it is worth noting that he does not seem troubled by his apparent conflation of the material reproduction of the subject's performance (the scripted and theatrical *habitus* or imitation) with the performative event itself, or with his identificatory one-to-one correspondence between the performer and actual 'hero' lifted from the written script, in an ideological transference in which emotional values are intromitted in a straight line and without inflection from character to actor to members of the audience.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, it will be recalled that Freud himself makes a similar ideological move or transference when he postulates that the key to interpreting Sophocles' play *Oedipus Rex* is based on identification, in a heightening of dramatic effect which is achieved when the spectators-cum-readers (unconsciously) identify with Oedipus the character-cum-actor, since they too wished to kill their father and sleep with their mother in childhood yet managed to suppress these desires in order to progress to a 'normal' sexual development as evidenced in later life.

In opposition to phenomenology, which addresses the physical and material realities of the performance situation and the experience of the lived body, semiotics – with its poststructuralist (or, in my view, almost antitheatrical) bent – views theatre

(and of course the body) as imbricated in semiology or a system of cultural signs rather than perception. The audience receives pleasure from interpreting a multiplicity of semiotic signs, the physical gestures and performative elements of the theatrical event. This is tied to Hans Robert Jauss's theory of audience reception and what he famously terms 'the horizon of expectations,' the implicit, cultural assumptions which the audience are thought to have and which they bring to bear in their interpretation of theatrical performances. By way of example, it will be recalled that many Greek audiences, *via* recourse to oral tradition, already knew the story of Oedipus long before Sophocles' dramatization of it. The same, of course, can be said of modern audiences who go to the theatre nowadays to watch theatrical performances of Shakespeare's plays with a horizon of preconceived expectations.<sup>13</sup> Thus, by manipulating and orchestrating an audience's emotional responses, a director could achieve dramatic effects, even directing the audience towards an Aristotelian *catharsis* or the purging of strong emotion.

In the 1980s and 1990s semiotics, which concerned itself with how meaning was constructed and modified in society, was seen as being one of the main driving forces in dramatic theory, displacing phenomenology and leading Ubersfeld to note that pleasure derived from the theatre is semiotic to the extent that it fills in the gap of the absent signifier, be it in the form of 'a god, the spool of thread for the mother, the stage for an absent 'reality.' Theatre as sign of a gap-being-filled' (qtd. in Bennett 73).

Thus, through the lens of performance, cultural and psychoanalytic theory many theorists have either tried to bridge the gap between the theatrical signifier (gesture) and its signified (meaning), between vision and perception, message and conceptual sign or to widen it and open out a plenitude of interpretative possibilities

by recourse to various theories concerning the theatre, the self and the other. One strand of this, as we have already mentioned, can be discovered in the work of feminist theorists on performance, notably the work of those such as Jill Dolan, Rebecca Schneider and Elin Diamond, to name a few, who have pursued this line of inquiry by examining the intricate relationships between viewing and perception in what is typically identified as phallogocentric theatre and how performance is inflected with intersubjective permutations and assumptions about the material body, gender, race and even class, assumptions which can be challenged or interrogated through aesthetic, theatrical forms in order to undercut – even subvert – phallic discourse.

Diamond, in particular, asserts the possibility of a ‘gestic’ feminist discourse by drawing on Brechtian aesthetics and, more specifically, Bertolt Brecht’s theory of the *gestus*, ‘the moment in performance when a play’s implied social attitudes become visible to the spectator’ (*Unmaking Mimesis* xiv). Although she is aware that ‘Brecht exhibits a typical Marxian blindness toward gender relations’ (44), she attempts to recuperate some of his theories such as the ‘alienation effect’ in order to show the payoffs it can have for feminist theory and discourses on gender. Indeed, Brecht’s A-effect, which stipulates the alienation of the actor from the character he is performing – and thus helps ground the character’s historicity ‘in contrast to the actor’s own present-time self-awareness on stage’ (50) – can be useful, according to Diamond, in dismantling the male gaze from its fixed locus of fetishizing the female body in representation.

Certain performance artists such as Orlan, whom I consider later on in my argument, could also be seen as dismantling this gaze through her surgical practices, in which she has surgeons cut up her skin and re sew and spatially reconfigure facial

parts, thus positing – in true postmodernist fashion – her fragmented body as text, the body-in-pieces which resists conforming to the typology of beauty standardized in the Western literary and artistic canon. Since Orlan claims to feel no pain during these operations, her performances may be read as attempts to alienate her spectators. Additionally, her invocations to theological cosmogonies and her attempts at reincarnation can be interpreted as an achievement of what Elaine Scarry calls the aversiveness of pain, the ‘sign of pain’s triumph’ (4).<sup>14</sup> Such an identification of materiality and discourse, the body as text or textual referent, may alert us to the stakes involved in eliding the ‘aesthetics’ of Orlan’s performative acts.

As we have seen, the body – whether it is seen as being a material, substantive entity or dematerialized, semiotic sign – is caught up in a discourse at the intersection of art and body politics, where social and political structures are often (re)enacted and (re)produced through individual acts and practices. The gendered body, historicized body, performing body, fragmented body, objectified body and the body in pain all point to the ineluctable, historical discursivity surrounding the body, from a Western metaphysics of presence to a de-subjectified semiotics to a postmodernist revision of notions of embodiment, where the body (as well as identity) is relegated to fictive, dialogical or constantly emerging and shifting positions.<sup>15</sup>

As aforementioned, the fact that the body can also function as a powerful sign of absence or loss within the discursive domain is especially prevalent in theatrical practices in which the female body is either not represented or comes dangerously close to being under constant erasure, suspended as it is ‘between the polarities of presence and absence’ (Phelan qtd. in Wray 193). The dialectic of absence/presence can be a very powerful political tool in augmenting the hegemony of male desire, with the absent and missing female body, as Juliet Mitchell notes in *Mad Men and*

*Medusas: Reclaiming Hysteria*, typically being linked to the hysterical body (221) and where even the very visibility of the female body can be seen, paradoxically, as a succumbing to phallogocentric visual culture.

Having said this, it is worthwhile noting that this visual realm is never completely secure. There is always a space *beyond* the visual medium or field which remains as lack, ‘which cannot be controlled, the unsymbolizable [Lacanian] Real’ (Lowry 280). The real can be read as a spatial or psychic category and has been linked to trauma since it resists both categorization and symbolic representation. Whatever the case, there is always an enigmatic residue which alerts us not only to the limits of what Edmund Husserl calls our visual horizons but also of our constant hermeneutical activity.

#### *Enigmatic and visual signifiers*

My work is informed by the work of several performance artists and theorists in a wide range of fields who examine the relationships and disjunctures between vision and perception. It also draws on trauma and psychoanalytic theory in order to show how such disjunctures in theatrical and dramatic performance can often lead to trauma or an unbridged gap between message and gestural or visual sign. Additionally, it points to how this gap can potentially be assimilated by acknowledging the ‘other’ both literally and metaphorically, on stage and in discourse, by recourse to a wide range of conceptual notions, with the psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche’s theory of the ‘enigmatic signifier’ occupying centre stage.

By revisiting and reformulating Freud’s theory of ‘anaclisis’ (as James Strachey translates it) or ‘leaning-on’ or ‘propping’ (*Anlehnung*), in which Freud describes the originary relationship the child has to its self-preservative bodily

functions and sexuality, Laplanche draws it away from its hidden latency and gives it its due prominence, foregrounding the early mother/child relationship as central to the child's future development. He also posits the notion of an enigmatic signifier or message which is transmitted from the adult caretaker – who is, in most cases, the mother – to the child and for which the child lacks an interpretative code or system. Embodied in extraverbal gestures, signs and physical expressions, these signifiers, which are partly sexual in nature and have both semantic and affective content, cannot be translated adequately by the child. Indeed, they cannot even be translated by the adult since they are simultaneously enigmatic and unconscious, 'in so far as they are not transparent to themselves, but compromised by the adult's relation to their own unconscious, by unconscious sexual fantasies set in motion by his [*sic*] relation to the child' (*Essays on Otherness* 79-80). The child will belatedly attempt to translate or assimilate these signifiers with their referential signifieds in order to escape, or at least mitigate, their traumatic effects.

Since vision is primarily linked to non-verbal and extra-linguistic cues which often escape representation and semanticity, the Laplanchean signifier can, in my view, provide us with fruitful ways of reading metatheatrical space, the visible performance itself and even the scenes enacted off-stage, which glaringly point to an absence or lacuna in visual terms which can forcefully be brought back to the fore of our optical terrain and consciousness. For the audience is constantly bombarded by clusters of signs and enigmatic signifiers both on and off-stage, signifiers which are only fully assimilated afterwards. As Bennett points out, there is a 'combination and succession of visual and aural signs which the audience receives and interprets, some fixed but the majority in flux, and which [...] signify on a number of possible levels' (140). These signs derive from external signs such as the set, props and lighting to

signs intimately linked to an actor's performance, which involves movement, costume, make-up, and facial and bodily expressions.

The French film theorist Christian Metz also suggests a relationship between the spectatorial and psychic economy of the audience which can be applied to a theatrical model of communicative transmission. He proposes that the spectator effects a 'mental leap which alone can lead him [*sic*] from the perceptual donnée, consisting of moving visual and sonic impressions, to the constitution of a fictional universe, from an objectively real but denied signifier to an imaginary but psychologically real signified' (qtd. in Bennett 39). It is this mental leap which the child must also make in order to arrive at a 'psychologically real signified.'

While clearly the signifiers in theatrical performance are not denied, it is often the case that the spectator needs to re(imagine) or (re)construct them in their mind's eye. As Green points out, the spectator's gaze is denied 'access to the invisible space off-stage,' that part of the stage which functions as a transgressive space or 'a radically uncrossable limit' (qtd. in Ellmann 43). This is especially pertinent for my analysis of the Ancient Greek play *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles, where the audience does not see Jocasta's self-strangulation or even Oedipus's self-blinding but only hears about these events from the Chorus. It is also evident in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, where the audience does not see the battles which take place in Act I or Lady Macbeth's assumed suicide. King Duncan's murder is not enacted on stage and it is possible that the same applies to Macbeth's own death at the hands of Macduff. As D.J. Palmer points out in relation to this Shakespearean play, 'there are degrees of visibility, and the language of the play, with its powerful appeal to the visual imagination, mediates between the seen and the unseen' (54). As Merleau-Ponty reminds us, the invisible can be found even in the visible, in 'the elective affinity

between the *eye* and the *mind*, as if the mind were the eye's metaphor.' For to look 'means postulating a given performance, a constituted space' (Pontalis 60-1).

As we have already seen, this space is always limited by the naked eye's capacities to assimilate the visual realm. After all, we can only see the world as it stands directly in front of our view rather than the entire world which surrounds us. Even the actor on stage is subject to a blind spot which is invisible and unperceived, for the subject who mimes 'cannot see himself miming another at the moment he is miming, just as he cannot say that he is playacting precisely while he is acting' (Borch-Jacobsen 39). This has led to several theorists denigrating, even demonizing, vision and destabilizing the equivalence of eye/I, knowledge and sight, by pointing to the illusory nature of our visual perceptions. This is what Jay has referred to as the antiocularcentric discourse, to which I shall now turn.

### *Antioocularcentrism*

I shut my eyes in order to see.

(Paul Gauguin)

There has been an unsettling anxiety about the illusory powers of deception surrounding the eye since ancient times. It will be recalled that in *The Republic* Plato points to the deceptive nature of sight by giving his famous example or allegory of a shadowed cave in which people are enchained, and in which they can see shadows reflected and projected on its walls through a fire which is behind them. Once the philosopher leaves this cave to turn towards the sun, he comes to the realization that these shadows are only reflections of the real rather than 'true' forms of reality, showing Plato's uncertainty and distrust when it came to relying solely on our sensory perceptions and imperfect eyes. It was, in fact, this distrust that led him to do away

with mimetic arts such as the theatre in *The Republic*, for the cave functions very much like an operating theatre, with its own illusionistic apparatus or set-up of shadows, lights and perspectives, which compels the chained men to only see forward rather than the fire – the actual method or mode of production – which is behind them.

It will be recalled that the postmodern feminist Irigaray takes up a critique of Plato's cave and transforms it into a womb-theater, materializing Plato's worst fears about theatre and its mimetic nature, the antvisual and female duplicitousness by positing no originary source of mimetic representation. She criticizes the supremacy of the male gaze in a predominantly phallogocentric culture, claiming that 'the eye objectifies and it masters. It sets at a distance, and maintains a distance. In our culture the predominance of the look over smell, taste, touch and hearing has brought about an impoverishment of bodily relations' (qtd. in Vasseleu 129).<sup>16</sup>

It is evident that in Greek culture Plato was not alone in his anxieties about the illusory nature of sight. The story of Narcissus is a case in point, as is the myth of Medusa, the Gorgon whose transfixed stare petrified into stone those who looked at her directly.<sup>17</sup> There were very real fears lurking in people's minds about the malevolent power of the evil eye. 'The frequent existence of apotropaic amulets and other devices to disarm the evil eye (which the Greeks called the *baskanos ophthalmos*) also suggests how widespread the fear of being seen existed here as elsewhere' (Jay 28). The distrust of literal sight and normal vision was also responsible for the privileging of the figurative and metaphorical sight of the seer, who was seen as having 'inner vision' and who could see truths which were denied to the naked eye. It is this which leads Oedipus to say of the blind prophet Tiresias that he is the 'master of all omens – /public and secret, in the sky and on the earth' (Sophocles lines 300-1)

and that his mind can see how the city of Thebes is faced with a plague only he can cure.

Plato's anxieties regarding sight are taken up by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche in the nineteenth century, who rereads Plato and effects a powerful critique that was to become highly influential in philosophical circles in France in the 1960s and 1970s. With Nietzsche comes the death of the Sun-God, that source of fiery illumination *par excellence* which illumines 'a reality of forms,' only to be 'replaced by a thousand and one suns shining on a multitude of different realities' (Jay 190). This view saw vision as being both passive and active and implicated in a multiplicity of different angles and perspectives. Hence the death of God and the God's-eye view in favour of a multiplication of eyes and a multitude of ways of looking at the world.

The metaphor of the sun as being a source of knowledge was also taken up by Georges Bataille, who shattered any Hegelian illusions of an absolute and transcendental knowledge by positing both a 'solar' anus and a 'rotten' sun (Jay 223). His works are marked by the violence which is repeatedly done to the eye. One of Bataille's contemporaries, the Surrealist painter Salvador Dali (about whose work Bataille in fact wrote) shares a similar, materialist bent, with paintings such as 'The Stinking Ass' (1928) and others where the violence of imagery and the depictions of dismembered or decomposing bodies, images of castration, ejaculation and fellatio, even excrement, are quite prevalent. I shall return to the relationship between Bataille and Dali in my examination of Dali's *Un chien andalou* (1929) in Chapter One.

Even the late Merleau-Ponty, in his revisions regarding the importance of perception, contributed to the antiocularcentric discourse. By positing a flesh of the world, which is 'individual' but 'also a dimension and a universal' which is exuded

everywhere, Merleau-Ponty posits an inhuman gaze and overthrows the subject's observatorial position, for 'it is not *I* who sees, not *he* who sees, because an anonymous invisibility inhabits both of us, a vision in general' (142). Such a presupposition, with its post-humanist inflections, unroots vision from its subjective base and places it in an impersonal Being, the flesh of the world. 'What I want to do is restore the world as a meaning of Being absolutely different from the "represented," that is, as the vertical Being which none of the "representations" exhaust and which all "reach," the wild Being' (253).

The French social theorist Michel Foucault was to renounce phenomenology altogether, since for him, unlike Merleau-Ponty, 'the light-Being refers only to visibilities' (Deleuze qtd. in Jay 387). For Foucault, who draws on Jeremy Bentham's famous example of the Panopticon in his *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, there can be no 'benign interaction of the visible and the invisible in the flesh of the world' (Jay 382). This is so because society is tightly imbricated in an authoritative and hierarchical structure of constant, controlled surveillance. Foucault states:

Our society is not one of spectacle, but of surveillance [...] We are much less Greeks than we believe. We are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are a part of its mechanism (217).

Even when there are spectacles or regal processions, where many can view the few or even the one embodied in the person of the king or monarch himself, these are, according to Foucault, tightly regulated and subsumed under this strict mechanism of surveillance and social control. There is no way out of this round-the-clock and mechanistic apparatus of control. As Jay notes, 'There was therefore no real escape from the "current empire of the gaze" into a more benign heterotropic alternative. For wherever Foucault looked, all he could see were scopic regimes of "*malveillance*" [or

hostility]’ (416). With the advent of new forms of technology, which could improve and extend the eye’s field of vision, the power of such scopic regimes could be further compounded.

*Eyes mediated through technology*

In *Illuminations* Walter Benjamin discusses the power of the camera to mediate between the seen and unseen. For the camera is seen as ‘penetrating’ into the human unconscious, and drawing forth an ‘unconscious optics’ which would otherwise have remained invisible to the naked eye: ‘Evidently a different nature opens itself to the camera than opens to the naked eye – if only because an unconsciously penetrated space is substituted for a space consciously explored by man’ (230).

In late industrial and postmodernist culture technological machines or visual apparatuses are read as prosthetic extensions of the body’s capabilities. What is more, the boundaries between bodies and machines, interior states of subjectivity and the external world, come crashing down only to be reconfigured in new ways, in ‘stylized assemblages of bodies, mechanisms, and landscapes.’ By drawing on ‘the logic of the modernist industrial design of *streamlining*,’ machine culture replaces the natural body with the naturalized body, and the machine itself becomes ‘anthropomorphized and domesticated’ (Seltzer 242). The body itself is no longer seen as simply being an image or semiotic sign; it is an inner machine covered with outer skin. ‘Under the skin, the body is an over-heated factory’ (Artaud qtd. in Seltzer 242).

This inside/outside divide has led to an obsessive desire to rip or tear the skin apart in order to see what lies underneath it. In her discussion of Gothic horror and modern horror movies, Judith Halberstam illustrates how the skin ‘forms the surface

through which inner identities emerge and upon which external readings of identity leave their impression.’ In horror movies the viewers are provided with what Halberstam refers to as skin shows or ‘a virtual skinfest’ whose main focus is ‘the shredding, ripping, or tearing of skin as a spectacle of identity performance and its breakdown’ (141). For critics such as Baudrillard, this description would hardly seem virtual in an era of post-industrial capitalism, where the wounded, fragmented or torn body can be found everywhere and is merely an abstract sign divorced from any anatomico-physiological setting, a mere symbol in ‘a world where all value has been reduced to the symbolic exchange of signifiers and as a result is fated to ‘indifference’ and equivalence, or rather the loss of all value’ (Harris 74).

Whatever the implications of Baudrillard’s bleak and ‘valueless’ postmodern outlook, I would like to hold on to Halberstam’s notion of identity performance as spectacle, as well as her focus on skin shows since it can help us to shed some light on modern dramatic performances such as those of Orlan and Franko B, whose radical skincutting in front of an audience, what I call blood play, allows us to reconceptualize the relationships between the body and the skin, materiality and consciousness.

Indeed, some critics such as Steven Connor have even tried to refute this relationship. As Connor notes in *The Book of Skin* the skin is not the body but can be viewed as ‘the body’s twin, or shadow.’ The skin ‘is always in excess of, out in front of the body, but *as another body*. The skin is thus always in part immaterial, ideal, ecstatic, a skin that walks’ (29). This notion of a walking skin is reminiscent, perhaps, of Orlan’s assertions that her body is merely a ‘vehicle’ in her search for her own identity. It will also be recalled that for Bergson the body was a vehicle of human choice.

What is elided or downplayed in such accounts is the acknowledgment of trauma. Connor only provides one reference for it in his index, and we have already seen how Orlan refuses to admit that her performances involve psychic and physical pain. Yet viewers of her performances who come to identify with her may disagree with her admissions. The following section fleshes out the relationship of vision to trauma and how performance and spectacle can function as explicitly traumatic events.

*Scopic regimes and traumatic visions*

According to Juliet Mitchell, trauma creates a gap in signification because it ‘is a breaking through of protective boundaries in such a violent (either physical or mental) way that the experience cannot be processed: the mind or body or both are breached, leaving a gap or wound within’ (*Siblings* 9). In effect, trauma is a crisis, even a dissolution, of representation. By definition it ‘cannot be represented’ (206). It severs the signifier from the signified at the time of its occurrence such that any attempts to belatedly represent or reconstruct the meaning of the traumatic event or experience are met with linguistic resistance, fraught as they are in ‘a language that defies, even as it claims, our understanding’ (Caruth 5). Indeed, for certain eminent clinicians such as Bessel van der Kolk, trauma itself cannot be tackled *via* narrativized mechanisms of recall and memory retrieval. As Ruth Leys points out in her descriptive and critical analysis of van der Kolk’s theorizations regarding trauma, traumatic memory is ‘iconic’ rather than subject to procedures of narrativization, ‘by which [van der Kolk] means that it is dissociated from all verbal-linguistic-semantic representation. Traumatic memories are “mute,” because they cannot be expressed in verbal-linguistic terms’ (247). This leads van der Kolk to suggest that all traumatic

memories, images and emotions rooted in the body can only be retrieved ‘by therapies of a nonlinguistic or “iconic” kind,’ which involve painting and drawing (249).

Quoting the physician van der Kolk, Eric Rosenberg uses his theories on trauma to elucidate Walker Evans’s work on photography in view of the Great Depression in the early 1930s. As van der Kolk points out, trauma has the capacity to create speechlessness and what I would like to call ‘a regression’ to imagistic or ‘iconic’ representations: ‘Experience cannot be organized on a linguistic level, and this failure to arrange memory in words and symbols leaves it to be organized on a somatosensory or *iconic* level: as somatic sensations, behavioural reenactments, nightmares, and flashbacks’ (Rosenberg 41).

Although Leys makes valid claims in her criticisms of van der Kolk’s approach to trauma, in its treatment of ‘pictures and visual images as if they were inherently nonsymbolic’ (249), I would still like to hold on to this concept of traumatic memory as being primarily visual. Additionally, I would also like to hang on to the idea of trauma as a gap in signification, as well as its resistance to belated narrativization, since it is precisely these aspects which allow us to come full circle and reconstitute Laplanche’s theory of the enigmatic signifier. For what is the enigmatic signifier if it is not an instance of the failure to assimilate and narrate the visual sign, that critical moment when the non-linguistic signifier as image fails to bind itself to a signified (meaning/concept) or signifieds? Trauma occurs at precisely this juncture, between assimilation and its resistance, between what is assimilated and what remains as an untranslatable residue, that is, ‘between what is symbolisable and what is not in the enigmatic messages supplied to the child [or adult]’ (*Essays on Otherness* 130). As Mitchell affirms, trauma is always already experienced by the

infant from the very beginning ‘as a blasting out, an annihilation of the proto-subject, a gap in its existence’ (*Siblings* 42).

This is important for two major reasons. Firstly, because it allows us to link trauma to nonverbal/visual and theatrical representations (for, after all, theatre is invariably linked to sight) and to posit a theatrical model in which the actor supplies enigmatic signifiers to the audience which the audience must then belatedly attempt to assimilate if trauma is to be averted or at least mitigated.<sup>18</sup> Secondly, it allows us to bring in (or rather to bring *back*) the other into the model of trauma, to move, that is, from ‘a generalized Ptolemaic model of endogenous development’ towards ‘a Copernican, other-centred, exogenous model of traumatic seduction’ (Fletcher 26). For ‘one’s own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another’ (Caruth 80). It is not an intrapsychic affair and hence ‘it is unrealistic to separate the individual’s psychological state from the multiple social forces by which it has been shaped, and in which it continues to be embedded’ (van der Kolk 153).

Yet, to begin with, ‘trauma’ (taken from the Greek and meaning ‘wound’), the very notion of trauma itself, curiously wavers between the intrapsychical and the social, the physiological and the psychical. Thus while medicine had, in the main, recognized trauma as purely physical, Freud’s psychoanalytic framework brought psychical trauma onto the scene also, in the form of an ‘internal foreign body,’ a shock to the system, which originates primarily from without and attacks – secondarily – from within. As he points out in *Studies on Hysteria*, which Laplanche quotes, the psychical trauma ‘acts like a foreign body which long after its entry must be continued to be regarded as an agent that is still at work’ (*Life & Death in Psychoanalysis* 42). Thus there is an internal-external bind or double logic here – what Laplanche cites as ‘a kind of *internal-external* instance’ – in which trauma

curiously wavers between inner and outer worlds (42). Thus while the shock of a car crash, for example, is an external event, the trauma (or rather the *memory* of the trauma) which it produces in the subject is at once physical and – although belatedly – psychical.

The internal-external bind also allows us to posit an ineluctable collapse between private and public boundaries, which is in itself a traumatic affair, and this is borne out by the trauma of the wound itself, which serves as an ambivalent marker on the cusp between the private and the public, perception and representation. As Caruth points out, the wound attempts to reach out to the other, to speak to the other and make it bear witness to its trauma. It is ‘the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another’s wound’ (80). Whether this listening actually materializes is another matter altogether.

I would like to hold on to this idea of trauma as wavering between the internal and external, since it is precisely this wavering or oscillation of trauma which, in my view, lends the wounds or cuts in Orlan’s and Franko B’s performances – mediated as they are through technological apparatuses – such an ambivalent status, making them appear at once psychical and social, virtual and real, a matter of both representation and perception at the same time. For while critics such as Baudrillard see wounds as being primarily ‘symbolic’ and semiotic, as disembodied artefacts or signs which circulate in a meaningless semiotics, the gaping wounds of Orlan’s face and Franko B’s body seem to specify otherwise. For they may be abstract signs, but they are *also* embodied, ‘real’ events. ‘They [describe] an exact language of *pain* (emphasis mine) and sensation, eroticism and desire’ (Ballard 90).

And, as we have already seen, wounds, like eyes, are the switch-point between the inner and outer world, the public and private registers. They are as much social as

they are private. As such, they do not meaninglessly circulate in a scopic, symbolic or erotic economy; they mark an event, a traumatic event which in itself has made possible this endless circulation and play of signifiers. And, what is more, it is precisely in this endless circulation that trauma is to be located. Hence the logic of trauma mimesis is played out. It is not simply that the wound-signs evidence the trauma; trauma comes back; it recurs in the circulation of wound-signs. More precisely, the recurrence of the trauma *itself* is traumatic in this endless circulation of signifiers.

It is the very mimetization of trauma which reproduces the trauma once more, ‘a trauma within a trauma,’ trauma mimetized. Yet, on another level, this very mimetization of trauma has the curious effect of also dispelling, even obliterating, the trauma (an effacement which serves once more to reawaken the trauma in an endless, repetitive cycle). As Jacques Derrida has occasion to remark in one of his interviews, to date a work of art such as a poem is to inscribe it with a wound which is straightaway effaced, since the date itself marks the poem’s singularity as an event at the same time as that singularity is necessarily lost in the date’s very iterability. And this is the same for all experiences in general:

Given that all experience is the experience of a singularity and thus is the desire to keep this singularity as such, the “as such” of the singularity, that is, what permits one to keep it as what it is, this is what effaces it right away.

*(Passages - from Traumatism to Promise 378)*

Thus at the same time as the traumatic event attempts to mark its singularity, there is a countermovement which constantly puts this singularity under erasure. Wounds are never quite singular events: they are iterable, repeatable, reproducible. They are concrete markers of pain that may also function as abstract, disembodied signs. As such, they are disseminated along the semiotic system like signatures, infinitely reproducible and infinitely prone to simulation. As Derrida aptly points out

in *Margins of Philosophy*, signatures function only in so far as they are repeatable or *iterable*, and thus able to be repeated in several different contexts (that is, the very fact of the signature's grounded repeatability ensures precisely that it can be repeated *elsewhere*). 'In order to function, that is, in order to be legible, a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form; it must be able to detach itself from the present and singular intention of its production' (328). Hence a signature, like a wound, can be endlessly counterfeited, imitated and simulated. This is nowhere more powerfully depicted than in Orlan's constant reproductive simulation of injuries through the mediation of her photographic images.

As Mark Seltzer documents in *Serial Killers*, there has come to be an increasing fascination with trauma as a form of public display, a fascination which has led to the creation of what he calls a 'wound culture', a 'public fascination with torn and open bodies and torn and opened persons, a collective gathering around shock, trauma, and the wound' (1). Orlan's and Franko B's performances are certainly a case in point, where performative wounds become not merely private but social, a public exhibit which is opened out for others to see. The wounds are not just a focal point which is often invested with erotic desire, religiously admired to the point of mystic idealization, but a contact-point or switch-point between inner and outer worlds. 'The switch-point, or crash-point, between inside and outside is, above all, the wound' (Seltzer 264).<sup>19</sup>

Wounds have clearly always been invested with religious significance. The wounds of Christ, for example, have often been visualized in paintings and Armando Favazza clearly shows how self-mutilators often draw on 'powerful religious and shamanic symbols' in their ritualized practices of self-cutting (46). Even Orlan, who refuses to align her work with self-mutilative and/or sadomasochistic practices,

purports to subjecting herself under the knife in order to attain reincarnation or a state of transcendent nirvana – a point to which I shall return.

Thus the image of the wound resonates with religious and mystical undertones. As Favazza acknowledges, ‘Through the spilling of blood and the removal of limbs, the garden of relationships among humans, god, and nature is watered, pruned, and cultivated.’ Harmony and equilibrium are maintained and reestablished through the eternal struggles between individuals and by way of religious ‘myths and personal dramas of dismemberment and reassembly, of wounding and healing’ (322). Paradoxically, cutting the body into pieces is seen as an entry into wholeness, rebirth and renewal, a fulfilment of the subject’s nostalgic desire to attain unified wholeness.

This somewhat optimistic reading is echoed by several trauma theorists who deal with the psycho-physiological aspects of trauma. As Peter Levine notes: ‘In the theater of the body, trauma can be transformed. The fragmented elements that perpetuate traumatic emotion and behaviour can be completed, integrated, and made whole again. Along with this wholeness comes a sense of mastery and resolution’ (189). Although Levine is specifically referring to psychical rather than physical trauma, it is important that he returns once more to the body, to the ‘theatre of the body,’ as the starting point of discourse and as the cathartic site of resolution. Theatre, trauma, vision – all three of them come together in the body.

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As Judith Herman points out: ‘The study of psychological trauma has a curious history – one of episodic amnesia. Periods of active investigation have alternated with periods of oblivion’ (7). She traces three key moments in history when psychological trauma ‘surfaced into public consciousness,’ the anticlerical, political

movement in France in the late nineteenth century, the shell shock of World War I and Vietnam War veterans and the sexual and domestic violence against women which fuelled the feminist movement (9).

Yet while trauma, or rather the study of trauma, is marked by moments of historical prominence, its oversight in other periods of history does not preclude its earlier existence. Thus my work employs a transhistorical approach because it is informed by a model of trauma which transcends time and place and also seeks to explore the convoluted relationships and permutations between sight and trauma – on both a literal and performative level – through time. It attempts to trace a cultural history of the gaze and of theatre, which, as we have already seen, is already intimately linked to theory and vision.

Theatre has clearly existed since prehistoric times. Yet the material and social conditions of dramatic performances and theatrical events have changed throughout time, permitting us to view the theatre with fresh eyes and from a myriad of theoretical and ocular positions. Thus my work draws not only on the work of phenomenologists such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty but also on the work of a wide range of diverse critical scholars and cultural and feminist theorists on trauma, vision and performance such as Cathy Caruth, Laura Mulvey, Juliet Mitchell, Martin Jay, Elin Diamond, Rebecca Schneider and Jill Dolan, amongst others. It also draws quite heavily from psychoanalytic theory in order to flesh out the relationship of vision to trauma and how performance and spectacle can function as explicitly traumatic events.

The theoretical background of this relationship is elaborated in great detail in Chapter One, which serves as an introduction into the associative links between vision, perception and trauma. This theoretical framework will then serve as a

backdrop to the subsequent chapters. Through an examination of Sophocles' canonical play *Oedipus Rex* in Chapter Two and Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in Chapter Three (both of which are examined by Freud), as well as an examination of their similarities in Chapter Four by recourse to their subversive potential in performance, and on to more recent self-reflexive performances of trauma like those of Franko B and the French performance artist Orlan, which are elaborated in great detail in Chapters Five and Six, respectively, I hope to show how the theoretical background on performance and vision, and through the lens of trauma theory, can shed light on and sharpen our understanding of these performances/plays. In short, an analysis of these performances will serve to illustrate the performativity of trauma through sight, that is, how vision (and nonvision) can become a traumatic and repetitive event when the signifier or gestural sign resists assimilation or incorporation into the figural space of definitive signification and meaning by both the character/performer/actor and the audience.

While my choice of dramatic plays and performances may seem somewhat arbitrary, I have chosen them specifically because it is my contention that this model of trauma – a model which transcends time and space and is produced when the visual sign is wrested away or dislodged from a meaningful signified or system of signification – is powerfully evidenced in them. It is the *viewing* which enacts the trauma for both the actor/character and the spectator. While clearly not all acts of looking are traumatic, it is performances and plays such as these which can, in my view, attest to the breakdown in signification precisely because they are so heavily saturated and preoccupied with the sight (site) of trauma as a gruesome, ghastly event and the failure to suture or even register the frightening gap or chiasmus between what is seen and how it is brought into reflective consciousness or perception.

In order to develop this idea of a breakdown in signification in more concrete terms I have chosen to use Laplanche's psychoanalytic theory, or rather his metapsychology, of the 'enigmatic' signifier, which serves as a reformulation of Freud's theory concerning the self and (m)other. Although Freud relegates women and their sexuality to some dark and obscure Minoan age of civilization, Laplanche brings back the female other into the forefront of his conceptual framework. It is my contention that it is precisely this theory which can bring back the other on the stage<sup>20</sup> and serves to unmoor the subject's/actor's/audience's assumptions of wholistic identity and meaning. Additionally, it may be used by feminist and critical theorists on gender and performance in order to further our understanding of theatrical conventions and activities.

From a feminist point of view, it would certainly go a long way towards bringing back the female other in performance and reclaiming her subjective status or presence, a presence which was, incidentally, non-existent in antiquity on the Ancient Greek stage and in Renaissance theatre. It would be a fruitful enterprise to pursue the idea further of how the enigmatic, usually genderized signifier can function on stage in order to disrupt the male subject's phantasy of phallogocentric power.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, the enigmatic signifier may also point us towards a potentially fruitful reading of metatheatrical space and the scenes enacted off-stage. To consider the theory of the 'enigmatic signifier' is to attempt to locate the trauma beyond tragic representation.

Thus I shall attempt to use the concept of this enigmatic signifier in order to 'wed' psychoanalysis with performance, cultural and feminist theories. However, it is important at the outset to make clear that while my work may be seen as developing from *within* psychoanalytic theories of trauma and sight, I am much more interested in tracing a cultural history of the gaze that takes in a critique of psychoanalytic concepts

and categories (which is why my reading will encompass thinkers and philosophers as diverse as Adam Smith, Georges Bataille and Paul de Man). Like all theories, I am not blind to the fact that Freudian psychoanalysis does have its limits and shortcomings, a point which will become explicitly clear in the chapters which follow. Thus I find it more worthwhile to examine Oedipus and Macbeth, together with Franko B and Orlan, as actors for the most part rather than patients. For by taking the latter approach, and by torturing the patients ‘unto death’ through extensive analyses, the literature has consistently come up against blindspots.

‘All the world’s a stage,’ says the pessimist Jaques in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, ‘And all the men and women merely players’ (2.7.139-40). It is only by acknowledging that these characters are also actors caught up in their own destiny that a more dynamic reading can materialize, a reading which sees visual acts and gestures as truly performative and traumatic events. More importantly, such a reading would allow for the aesthetic and cultural dimensions of theatre to take centre stage.

\*

## Chapter One

### The Fractured I/Eye and the Traumatic Gaze in Theatre

...for me to have not an idea, an image, nor a representation, but as it were the imminent experience of them, it suffices that I look at a landscape, that I speak of it with someone. Then, through the concordant operation of this body and my own, what I see passes into him...There is here no problem of the *alter ego* because it is not *I* who sees, because an anonymous visibility inhabits both of us, a vision in general, in virtue of that primordial property that belongs to the flesh, being here and now, of radiating everywhere and forever, being an individual, of being also a dimension and a universal.

(Merleau-Ponty 142)

What Merleau-Ponty so rightly illustrates in his ground-breaking work on vision and its dynamics is that the very question of seeing is not only intimately linked, in Kantian terms, to representation and perception but is also a bodily experience which is inscribed on the flesh.<sup>1</sup> Yet the very process of this inscription presupposes not just a viewing subject who *sees* (in the sense of either mentally perceiving an object or having it readily available to sight through physical and tangible representation) but also a viewing subject who can iterate, in the ‘here and now’, through what Julia Kristeva calls a *state of flesh*, what he sees to an other outside himself, the not-I which serves to moor the subject’s scopic vision to the realm of concrete experience.<sup>2</sup>

Thus a two-fold process is ensured whereby the thing that is *seen* is also iterated in and through language, mediated through my flesh to ‘pass into’ the other. Yet even before this idea-image-representation passes through the semiotic system of signs, that is, before I can even begin to verbalize that which I see and hence enact a folding into the other’s skin through my own body’s ‘semiotic function,’ I need to be able to assimilate the concatenation of symbols which pass before my field of vision into a kind of semantic coherence.<sup>3</sup> This is precisely why sight itself has such mesmerising power; it antedates language and operates as an *a priori* given which navigates the

realm of recognition. As John Berger aptly points out in *Ways of Seeing*, 'seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak' (7).<sup>4</sup> Thus assimilation of the scopic field and recognition of its existence precede experiential knowledge that is acquired *via* recourse to a linguistic system.

Undoubtedly this field of vision itself encapsulates both the perceived object as it is mentally imaged and the physical object *per se* in all its materiality. That there is, to begin with, a split between the mental idea of an object and its physical representation in reality is not a novel idea. Plato, for example, postulates in his philosophical writings that material objects are merely imitations of a 'real' form or idea which is both abstract and transcendent, a form which breaks with spatio-temporal boundaries and subsists along the axis of representation as both a mental image and a pure archetype beyond the sphere of mental consciousness.<sup>5</sup>

Certainly it is noteworthy that Plato's pupil Aristotle expounds on the faulty reasoning which is implicit in the Platonic Idea, insofar as it manifests itself simply as a pure and transcendental entity that is divorced from individual sense-perception and anchored in a public domain of universals. Yet what interests me here is not so much whether the image can exist independently of the mind or the perceptual apparatus. Nor is it a question of whether the image functions as a concrete representation of some universal archetype or is subsumed under the realm of individual sensory experience and thus subsequent knowledge. To pose such a bipolarity would, in effect, be a disservice; all images can be detached from spatio-temporal contexts and relegated to some conceptual sphere of abstraction, yet this is not to say that these images cannot be brought to bear on an individual's sensory perception within the framework of a semantic field of experience.<sup>6</sup>

Hence, whereas it is undoubtedly the case that individual sense-perception precedes the universal or public domain of reality (either as abstract or concrete), it is the subsequent interaction of individuals with this domain which consolidates their knowledge of the outside world as constituted in and through ideas and representations. Thus one mode of reasoning leads on inevitably to the next in a coexistent series, and it is the constant interaction between these two modes which allows for what Merleau-Ponty defines as both ‘a dimension and a universal.’

In terms of dimensional self-reflexivity, the visual image first inscribes itself as sense-perception in the mind’s eye.<sup>7</sup> As Simon Goldhill points out, this concern with self-reflexivity is certainly not a new concept; it can be traced as far back as the 5<sup>th</sup> century in Ancient Greece. The Greeks had established the connection between knowledge and sight through their common etymological derivation: ‘Since in Greek the word “to know” (*eidenai*) is semantically and morphologically cognate with the word “to see” (*idein*), the “analytique du regard” is always already an anatomy of the subject’s claim to know’ (20).<sup>8</sup> Thus the visual image’s sensory inscription in the mind always already assumes its assimilation and incorporation into consciousness. However, for the image to gain its full semantic impact, in other words, for the image to be fully able to cloak itself in invested meaning, it needs to be mediated through an-other’s field of vision. As Sartre explains in *Existentialism and Humanism* (1946): ‘I cannot obtain any truth whatsoever about myself, except through the mediation of another. The other is indispensable to my existence’ (45). As Berger aptly observes, ‘soon after we can see, we are aware that we can also be seen. The eye of the other combines with our own eye to make it fully credible that we are part of the visible world’ (9).

Yet since the mental image itself is only an imitation of its actual physical representation, it necessarily follows that what is incorporated or *internalized* within the mind's eye is only a referential and disembodied sign of the material image.<sup>9</sup> Thus on a scopic level, this schism between perception and representation creates an *a priori* fracture between the organic eye which sees and the mental eye which perceives, a disequivalence between the I/eye. This schism or disjunction has led critics such as Lacan to posit a split between the gaze/eye by recourse to a visual theory which incorporates the other and hence destabilizes the observing subject's privileged, ocular position. Since the gaze becomes externalized in an other or other object, 'the viewing subject becomes merely a function of the visual field' who is divested of his mastery and 'becomes the object in and of a spectacle' (de Bolla 68).

Other critics have tended to either fetishize or objectify the eye, while at the same time maintaining a wary apprehension of its deceptive and illusory powers. Disillusioned by the First World War and its visually disorienting effect, with its 'bewildering landscape of indistinguishable, shadowy shapes, illuminated by lightning flashes of blinding intensity, and then obscured by phantasmagoric, often gas-induced haze' (Jay 212), many critics such as Bataille and Surrealist artists such as Dali tried to provide complex, often violent, interrogations of vision after the war. As E. Ann Kaplan notes in *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*, 'French surrealism dealt with the unconscious and with terror in the wake of World War I in painting and visual culture' (85). Bataille's *Story of the Eye* (1928), which came out in four editions, and Dali's filmic masterpiece *Un chien andalou* (1928) are postwar attempts to interrogate this visual culture.<sup>10</sup>

In his graphic *Story of the Eye*, which borders on pornographic art and denigrates vision, Bataille provides us, interestingly enough, with an eye that does not

see. In it, the heroine Simone is seen playing with the enucleated eye of a strangled priest and inserting it ‘into the profound crevice of her arse,’ as if it were some fetishized object or dildo. When the narrator, as onlooker, slides Simone’s thighs open he sees the eye ‘gazing’ back at him, and he discovers that he ‘even felt as if my eyes were bulging from my head, *erectile* with horror’ (Bataille 66-7, italics mine). The eye thus becomes a phallic symbol, erect and tumescent. Yet it is not merely eroticized or fetishized but rooted out of the material body to become nothing more than a spherical sign circulating in an endless chain of signifiers. As Roland Barthes makes clear in his analysis of Bataille’s story, it cannot be said ‘that the metaphor sets out from the genital to end up with such apparently asexual objects as egg, eye, or sun.’ There is no predominant sign, not even the eye, because all signs slide into other signs so that the story becomes ‘a perfectly spherical metaphor: each of its terms is always the significant of another term (no term being a simple thing signified) without it being possible ever to break the chain’ (*The Metaphor of the Eye* 122).

This gives rise to a collage of Surrealist images – interlinked metaphors such as egg, eye, sun and testicle – which possess the ‘metonymic freedom’ to spill or slip into an endless ‘exchange [of] meanings and usages.’ Thus suns can cry, beams of light can turn into streams of urine, eggs can be sucked like breasts and the bull’s testicle can be bitten ‘like an egg’ or inserted into the body (*The Metaphor of the Eye* 125). Unlike James Thomson’s ‘bleeding eyeless socket’ (12) in *The City of Dreadful Night* (1870-4), which represents blindness and the horror or resignation of the loss of religious faith – a symbolic foreclosure of the signified *avant la lettre* – Bataille’s eye wanders endlessly across Simone’s thighs in an endless chain of signification.

Yet the story of the enucleation of the eye and the often violent separation of sight from the body does not end here. In the famous, silent film *Un chien andalou*

(1929) by Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dali, which Bataille had seen, there is a well-known, opening scene of Buñuel sharpening a razor and then using it to neatly slice through a woman's eye. This graphic scene is shot in an extreme close-up as the eye's vitreous fluids ooze down like jelly.



Plate 1.1 *Un Chien Andalou* – Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dali, 1929. Xianart.  
Photo: Christian Stalley.

Since Buñuel was acquainted with Freud's work, the act of enucleation can also be seen as a substitute displacement for the fear of castration.<sup>11</sup> In 'The 'Uncanny'' (1919) Freud points to the relationship between the eye and the male genitalia:

A study of dreams, phantasies and myths has taught us that anxiety about one's eyes, the fear of going blind, is often enough a substitute for the dread of being castrated. The self-blinding of the mythical criminal, Oedipus, was simply a mitigated form of the punishment of castration.  
(352)

It is also known that Freud and the artist Dali briefly met in 1938. This meeting is documented by Gilbert Rose in *Trauma and Mastery in Life and Art* (1987). As Rose points out, Freud was ambivalent about the young artist's work, both 'repelled

[and] fascinated with Dali's combination of passion and control' due to his inner conflict 'between derogatory and idealizing attitudes' in relation to art (13).

For Dali's work is marked by overflowing images of dismembered bodies which can barely be contained within their referential frame, and deals with anxieties relating to vision and the chiasmus between representation and perception. Of course such anxieties have also been depicted by other painters and artists as well. They are captured and interrogated quite powerfully, in fact, by the Mexican painter Frida Kahlo (who was influenced by Dali) in many of her sketches. Kahlo was obsessed with trauma and vision, as well as photography, and several of her sketches depict the third eye or spiritual *chakra*, which represents the inner eye of wisdom in several religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism. Like Dali, her work is saturated in surrealist images of the dismembered body, as well as wandering or multiple eyes dislocated from their sockets (Plate 1.3). In a piece entitled *The Watching Eye* (1934) she shows the disjunction between perception and representation, as the eye attempts to arrogate and imprint onto itself all the things within its visual domain. Yet, as Plate 1.2 shows, these images cannot be contained and sip out into the sclera.

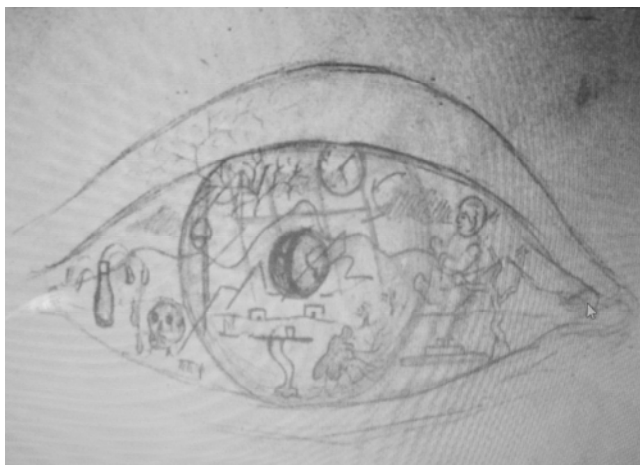


Plate 1.2 *The Watching Eye*, 1934, Pencil on paper, 8" x 12". Collection of Juan Coronel Cuernavaca, Mexico.



Plate 1.3 *Karma II*, 1946, Pencil and ink on paper, 8½” x 11¼”. Private Collection, New York.

Vision is multiple and fractured. What is more, this fracturing of vision, reminiscent of Nietzsche’s multitudinous suns, is further proliferated by the mediation of the eye of the other, which serves to split subjective markers of vision into supplementary fragments. This is always mediated through a discourse of desire. As Irit Rogoff notes, there are two critical traditions of the gaze. Whilst one is concerned with the gaze as an instrument in the investigation and validation of scientific and technological Western post-enlightenment processes, the other implicates desire and spectatorship through a mediated other. Thus ‘the gaze as desire’ divides ‘spectatorship into the arena of desiring subjects and desired objects, a separation increasingly tempered by the slippages between the ever-eroding boundaries of exclusive objecthood and coherent subjecthood’ (189).

The subject, constituted as it is by the other's gaze and desire, is caught in a traumatic exchange or dialectic of gazes. The body is thus objectified and, like the actor on a stage, put 'on display to the gaze of the Other' (Jay 289). In this display the body constantly *slips*, according to Rogoff, between 'exclusive objecthood and coherent subjecthood.' Since the gaze is often conceived of as being masculine, there has been a growing interrogation amongst feminist artists of how the gaze, which is often fetishistic, attempts to objectify and master the female body as object. In an attempt to subvert the hegemonic hierarchy of the masculine gaze, artists such as Carolee Schneeman and Barbara Kruger have attempted to resituate the gaze in a dialectic interplay between viewer and viewed, subject and object.

In her installation *Eye/Body* (1963), which was performed in her own attic, Schneeman attempts to reclaim her own agency and naked body as an artist by placing herself 'into the environmental frame of her art' and 'painting, greasing and chalking herself' in a kind of stylized, shamanistic ritual. She becomes not only a body which can be seen but also 'a bodily eye' which sees (Schneider 33).



Plate 1.4 *Eye/Body*, 1963. Photo by Erro. Reproduced in Schneider, 34.

In the same way, Barbara Kruger's photograph or ad-scape *Your Gaze Hits the Side of My Face* (1981) depicts a woman's bust in profile with the collaged slogan-title on the left-hand side. In an ironic twist, the viewer, who is presumably male, does not simply 'hit' his gaze across or against the (objectified) object. The object itself, which is also an instance of the commodification of desire, 'hits the face of the viewer, in the way that commodities, such as cars or women's bodies, careen across ads repeatedly to grab us, catch us, implicate us in the lure of their constructed vanishing points' (Schneider 90-1).

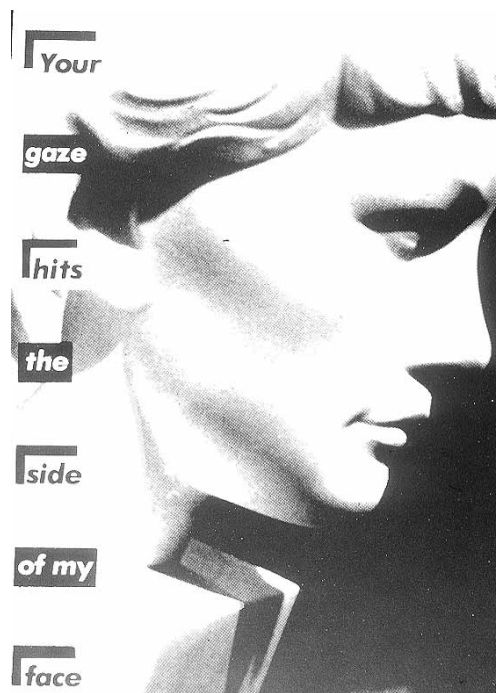


Plate 1.5 *Untitled (Your gaze hits the side of my face)*. 1981. Photograph, 55" x 41".  
Reproduced in Schneider, 91.

Schneider's reference to a vanishing point is not incidental. It is linked to 'a theory of optics based on the illusion that parallel lines converge at a point in the distance.' Whereas the vanishing point is located within the frame there is 'a parallel point outside the frame called the viewing point' in which spectatorial space is

constructed (Phelan 23-4). The body is located at this ‘vanishing point of vision, the hole into which the eye cannot penetrate’ (39).<sup>12</sup> The male gaze always attempts to insert itself in the viewing position and to ‘penetrate’ the feminine body. As E. Ann Kaplan makes clear, ‘The gaze is not necessarily male (literally), but to own and activate the gaze, given our language and the structure of the unconscious, is to be in the ‘masculine’ position’ (qtd. in Davy 140).

Even the theatrical stage, which is often metaphorically associated with the feminine, makes women into the object of a predominantly male, spectatorial gaze. As Kate Davy points out, the stage itself, which is ‘the site of the spectacle, the artificial, the histrionic, the site of deceit, conceit, and disguise,’ is ultimately linked to woman herself as spectacle (140). At the same time, women have often been absent from representation. We have already noted how in Ancient Greek and Renaissance theatre women were missing from the stage, yet even in modern society it is possible to find examples of the absent woman who is not seen on stage, in filmic and cinematic representations, as well as other art forms. Even when the woman does appear, her role is either often downplayed or she risks being done away with or killed by the end of the artistic representation – like Lord Alfred Tennyson’s *The Lady of Shalott* or Alexandre Dumas’s *The Lady of the Camellias* – because of her excessive, often sexual, and potentially dangerous desires. As Olga Taxidou points out in *Modernism and Performance: Jarry to Brecht* the demimondaine or latter heroine, Marguerite Gautier, is the ‘dying romantic heroine who epitomises the difficult relationship between women and the stage’ (96).

Thus the feminine is seen as being an enigma or Sphinx’s riddle, ‘represent[ing] a boundary, a space to be traversed, similar to the *limen* inhabited by the Sphinx’ who is situated at the frontier between the desert and the city-state (Mulvey x). Thus, in

solving the enigma of sexual difference, Oedipus does away with the maternal Sphinx and his mother Jocasta, who also commits suicide ‘after Oedipus has learned who she is.’ Thus it is that ‘the murder [or rather the suicide] of the primitive mother, who is represented in the form of a monstrous riddle (the Sphinx), acts as the gateway to the realization of Oedipus’s trajectory’ (Jacobs 58). It is a ‘metaphorical’ murder, for Oedipus kills the mother with words – or rather with one word – ‘Man’ – instead of shedding her blood, thus paving man’s entry into the symbolic order. Thus Ellmann makes the general point that it is fundamentally crucial for the play to be perceived as ‘a tragedy of words rather than a tragedy of deeds’ (8).

As Goux points out, it is this moment – the moment Oedipus speaks the word – which leads to his downfall since in attempting to define himself auto-referentially and auto-ontologically and to vanquish the Sphinx by recourse to autonomous and reflective reasoning, ‘by the sole power, the consummate power, of his reflection,’ he has not managed to dispel the alterity of the other (73). He has also defied the gods by ‘making man the measure of all things’ and hubristically assuming that the ego can achieve complete mastery ‘without any transindividual alterity’ (134).

Thus Oedipus makes the fundamental error of assuming that there can be only one subjective (or linguistic) position from which to view or say things and that the word – which is, in true Hegelian fashion, the philosophical word of enlightened truth and reason – is powerful enough to make the Sphinx disappear from his sight. As Mitchell notes, although the struggle between the Sphinx and Oedipus has been seen as ‘a physical contest’ between the mother and baby, in which the baby devours the mother’s breast in retribution because of imaginative fears that the mother ‘will eat the infant,’ it has also been suggested that the Sphinx is Oedipus’s sibling ‘and would therefore stand as a more primitive version of Antigone – Antigone not as a daughter

but a sister and whom, being a sister, Oedipus must vanquish' due to sibling rivalry (*Siblings* 54). As Goux points out, the Sphinx has also been symbolically linked to 'a devouring dog' as well as being a seductive temptress or *femme fatale* (36-7). She is a kind of sacred dog, a reversed God (or Goddess) of the third sex, whose representative form is highly reminiscent of the Egyptian god Anubis, part dog and part man, who carried off the souls of the dead to the underworld for cleansing. For Pierre Vidal-Naquet in *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* she 'is not the female monster disgorged by the earth' but 'simply the "horrible singer" who asks the riddle' (326).

That the Sphinx can be seen or read in several different ways attests to the multiplicity of vision and the impossibility of firmly locating the Sphinx in any one place of signification. Paradoxically, it is through the divisive slippage or prismatic chaos of different visual markers that substantive meaning can be created. Through the chain of non-linguistic signifiers which instantiate the mediation between self and other, object and idea, a unified and coherent narrative is formed which – although prelinguistic at the outset – firmly and *a posteriori* roots itself in language. It is this unified narrative which Oedipus elides by eliding the Sphinx and its alterity.

It has often been claimed that through the mediation of the other the I/eye is able to assimilate the fractured and fragmented signifiers into a cohesive whole and to give utterance to that which is seen. Through such assimilation we can achieve what Griselda Pollock calls 'new pleasures, a 'new language of desire' (qtd. in Rogoff 199).<sup>13</sup>

Yet one may ask what happens when this assimilation fails to take place, that is, when the process of signification does not lead to a coherent and unifying narrative? Indeed, what happens when the non-linguistic signifier as image fails to bind itself to a signified (meaning/concept) or signifieds? At this point I should like to turn to the

French psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche, whose seminal work *Essays on Otherness* denotes a landmark in psychoanalytic theory in its revisitation and reformulation of Freudian precepts. Although Laplanche deals, for the most part, with non-verbal and gestural modes of expression that a parent addresses to its child, his notion of an enigmatic signifier that leaves behind it a residue or surplus is, in my view, highly suggestive. For Laplanche the child attempts to assimilate or ‘translate’ the enigmatic cues or gestures which it receives from its primary caretaker into an understandable code. The term ‘translation’ is, to all intents and purposes, a pertinent one, for the process of translation necessarily implies that there is both an addressor who transmits a message and an addressee who receives it and attempts to assimilate it. When assimilation fails, something is necessarily lost in translation, and what is lost is the absolute meaning of the signifier. I should like to hold on to Laplanche’s model here precisely because it is a dynamic and interpersonal one of human contact and deftly ushers in the notion of trauma.<sup>14</sup>

In short, Laplanche locates an originary moment of trauma in the scene of primal seduction – a psychical scenography which keeps returning in Freud’s work even though he abandons it – that occurs between a child and an adult, where the adult supplies the child unconsciously with enigmatic, for the most part sexual, messages that the child fails to assimilate or translate into a known formula. These messages are then repressed, yet it becomes possible to quantitatively gauge ‘the measure of the quantity of the trauma’ by estimating the discrepancy – or ‘the measure of the difference’ – between what the child assimilates and what remains as an untranslatable residue, that is, ‘between what is symbolisable and what is not in the enigmatic messages supplied to the child’ (*Essays on Otherness* 130). Yet what is at stake here is much greater, since this process of signification is ultimately

‘transferred’ onto new chains of signifiers in an attempt to assimilate or bridge the traumatic gap between signifier (word/gesture) and signified (message/meaning).<sup>15</sup>

As Laplanche points out in his examination of Freud’s seduction theory, what Freud had originally posited was a primary scene in which the mother seduces the passive and sexually immature child. The child is unprepared for this seduction, an unpreparedness which of itself initiates the trauma. Laplanche makes the astute observation that this is comparable to the ‘traumatic neurosis in adults, where the essential feature of the trauma relates to the fortuitous character of the accident, to the fact that the subject [or child] was not prepared for it’ (*New Foundations for Psychoanalysis* 107). Since the first scene of seduction cannot be understood or assimilated by itself, it is the superimposition of other subsequent scenes onto this first scene which later allows for the restructuring of a coherent narrative; all other scenes must be seen as engaging in a dialogue with this first scene. In the same way as it is possible to retrace the first written layer in the palimpsestual and layered scribbles of the Ancient Egyptian papyri, the palimpsestual layering of scenic topographies that are imbued with sexual traces could also thus be unearthed to recover this originary first scene of primal seduction. As Laplanche indicates, Freud ‘works backwards’ in order to identify ‘the true primal scene’ (109).

As Laplanche indicates, this Freudian notion of a primal scene of seduction has both its weaknesses and its strengths; the fact that Freud kept abandoning it and returning to it suggests his inherent desire to locate an originary and defining moment, what Laplanche calls an ‘apophantic’ scene, that will in and of itself be ‘self-explanatory’ and serve to reveal ‘the meaning of the whole sequence [of scenes]’ which succeed or postdate it (*New Foundations for Psychoanalysis* 115). The word ‘apophantic’ is suggestive here and employed by Laplanche precisely because it

ushers in an element of mystery. It is perhaps also slightly reminiscent, in terms of its phonetic structure, of a revelatory *epiphany* or moment of profound self-discovery.

Whatever the case may be, Freud's insatiable search for a specific moment in which to definitively locate trauma – a scene, that is, which can be positively identified as forming the locus of both trauma and originary desire, is doomed to fail (and thus become an intangible illusion). Desire, like trauma, is mimetic; there is no moment or scene which marks either of them as specific precisely because they are deferred 'imitations' or reproductions of feelings of loss and absence. Certainly the desire for an object is the desire for the lost object. Yet it is also, as Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen stipulates, an 'effect' which is derived from the imitation of others' desire.

Thus 'the desire for an object is a desire-effect; it is *induced*, or at least secondary, with respect to the imitation – the mimesis – of the desire of others.'<sup>16</sup> Hence this model of desire, in my view, posits it at once at two removes from an originary or specific, identificatory moment. Not only is desire already an imitation in so far as it is triggered by the loss of its referential object, but it is also *always already* mimetic in its imitative and compulsive identification with the desire of another. This desire remains always already deferred along the axis of representation, constantly pointing to the traumatic and glaring gap between subject and object and the impossibility of suturing it.<sup>17</sup> This explains why trauma is compulsive mimesis, and mimesis itself is always already mimetized. I shall pick up on this idea of the logic of trauma mimesis once more in my examination of certain dramatic and theatrical performances. For now, suffice it to say that trauma recurs and replicates itself in so many scenes or moments that it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to locate the very first scene of trauma.

Yet this failure to locate an originary moment, which resonates perhaps with man's illusory desire to retrieve a lost Edenic paradise that is always foreclosed to him due to his fall from divine grace, is not meant to signify that all attempts at signification or desire are forever doomed to result in disillusionment. Although Artaud attempts to redeem and resurrect a body which cannot be redeemed, there is, arguably, a certain pleasure to be derived from both the deferral of desire and the mimesis of trauma, since their very inability to lead to complete satiety and total or momentous signification ensures the subject's constant quest for meaning and identity. What is more, it is precisely this breach or fracture in the subject's identity, a fracture which already bespeaks the loss of stable meaning, which marks him or her as human and moors the subject precisely as a desiring or traumatized individual in a social network of endless others who are ultimately faced with the same destiny. Rather than simply lead to utter disappointment, therefore, such a state of affairs is liable to open out a plenitude of possibilities.

Drawing from Laplanche's general ideas on translation and the enigmatic signifier, it is actually possible to formulate a notion of trauma as being that very gap or suture between the image and its signified which resists closure. In a similar vein, Rosenberg has noted that trauma 'is what it is because [...] it disallows narrative closure' of 'conscious experience' and resists integrating 'meta-experience' (41).<sup>18</sup> The fact that closure is short-circuited implies that trauma's destiny is to be forever caught between assimilation and dissolution, representation and indecipherability, in its repeated attempts to make the traumatic fragments or enigmatic signifiers of a person's life history into an assimilable and coherent narrative. There is certainly a kind of pleasure to be derived from the hope of such assimilation, the repetition, that

is, of traumatic scenes through the power of story-telling and the art of recall in an attempt to make sense of them.

The whole process of trauma treatment centres in fact on the ability of the traumatized patient or analysand to tell and retell the story of his or her trauma in order to make sense of the enigmatic signifiers and subsequently assimilate them. Arguably this retelling of his or her traumatic story will allow the patient to gain some degree of mastery over it without much recourse to the analyst's help or guidance. As Colin Wastell points out, due to 'the fragmentary nature of traumatic memory' the analysand will have to retell his or her story to the therapist 'a number of times in order to build up a picture of the [traumatic] event which is sufficiently coherent' in order that it may 'be able to integrate the event into their life narrative' (80).<sup>19</sup>

The trauma is thus played out over and over again, a phenomenon which Freud describes as the compulsion-to-repeat in his seminal essays 'The 'Uncanny'' (1919) and 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (1920). In his references to clinical experience with patients, Freud asserts in the latter essay that 'a possibility of pleasure' is turned – *via* the processes of *repression* – 'into a source of unpleasure' (221). What is more, this unpleasure is constantly repeated, 'under pressure of a compulsion' (231). Furthermore, by revisiting the former text 'The 'Uncanny'' (which was written by Freud slightly earlier in time) in light of these assumptions of a compulsion-to-repeat, it becomes possible to trace Freud's germinating idea of a repetitive drive – the drive for/of death – which incidentally harks back to repressed reality and unconscious desires and fears.

Certainly I shall return to these two critical essays later on in my examination of the dramatic plays and performances. For the moment, however, I would like simply to pick up on this idea of a repetition compulsion as elaborated by Freud in them,

since it is precisely this repetition compulsion which makes itself felt both in analysis in a strictly psychoanalytic sense (in the analysand/analyst scenario) but also in analysis as interpretative *performance*. Trauma is a specifically performative event and by turning once more to Laplanche's model it is possible in fact to link Freud's notion of the compulsion-to-repeat to the repetitive attempts of both the child and later on the analysand to assimilate the enigmatic signifiers received by both the primary caregiver and the therapist (who acts, in certain respects, as a surrogate parent).<sup>20</sup> In a similar manner, the actor-cum-performer transmits enigmatic signifiers or visual gestures in performance which the spectator-cum-analyst is called upon to decipher and subsequently assimilate.

Before engaging with the performative aspects of these enigmatic signifiers, however, and thus spelling out the stakes more clearly, I would like to examine Laplanche's model in a bit more detail. For if in its reformulation of Freud's theories the Laplanchean model of assimilation between primary caregiver and child is to be taken at face value, then the traumatic signifiers which fail to be intromitted into the child's perceptual awareness are later transposed in adult life into the analytic frame in an attempt to bind them. Thus analysis *belatedly* attempts to bind these traumatic signifiers.<sup>21</sup> Since according to Freud it is common for the primal scene to be replete with such traumatic signifiers it serves as the perfect example. The originary scene is marked by an untranslatable residue precisely because the child is unconsciously faced with what it sees as the potential loss of the primary caregiver or love object to the father. Viewed in this light, the process of transference becomes a repeated attempt to play back an originary primal scene of seduction and desire in an effort to assimilate it. And behind this constant (re)construction of an originary scene lies the

driving force which fuels the entire circuit or system, the force of implosive repetition – the compulsion-to-repeat – which surfaces as both cause and symptom.

In this way, transference itself becomes *always already* liable to transference, what Laplanche calls ‘the transference of the transference,’ since the primal transference is always transferred, re-opened and re-constituted anew (*Essays on Otherness* 131). That there is in fact a primal transference which always repeats itself points us in the direction of Laplanche’s reconfiguration of the Oedipal structure so that it can account for both primal seduction and genetic transmission. As he points out in *Life & Death in Psychoanalysis*, when reconstructing ‘the child’s oedipal complex as a triangular situation,’ it must not be forgotten ‘that at two vertices of the triangle each adult protagonist is himself the bearer of a small triangle and even of a whole series of interlocking triangles’ (45).

Hence if transference induces and is induced by transference, a two-way relationship of this kind can account for the transferral and passing on of the triangulated Oedipal schema of mother/father/son – together with all that this implies – from one generation to the next. Although Freud fails to engage adequately with inter-generational transmission, a topic which Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok explore in great detail in their postulation of a silent, alien and transgenerational phantom which is transmitted ‘from the parent’s unconscious into the child’s (173)’ and thus haunts the subject’s mental topography, the originary primal scene where the child sees its parents having sex is later replayed and reworked into a more complex and definitive psychic scenography of Oedipal relations – Freud’s famous Oedipal complex theory. It is to this theory that I shall now turn.

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## Chapter Two

### In Dread of the Wandering Eye: Oedipal Visions, Enucleated Eyes and the Scopic Regime of *Malveillance* in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*

It is a terrible thing to see and have no vision.

(Helen Keller)

Sophocles' tragic drama *Oedipus Rex*, from which Freud draws his Oedipus complex theory, centres around the well-renowned story of Oedipus, the King of Thebes who unwittingly kills his father Laius and marries his mother Jocasta. Upon discovering what he has done Oedipus is horrified and blinds himself with his mother's golden brooches which he has seized from her dead body. In his reading of the story Freud attaches a great deal of significance to the dual events of the parricide and incest, and extrapolates from them that the reason why they exert such emotional valence is because they reflect the unconscious wishes and desires that any young boy experiences in his early formative years. In short, boys unconsciously desire to possess their mothers and to kill their fathers, who function as rivals for the mother's love and affection. Both events are thus inextricably linked according to Freud.

In 'The Question of Lay Analysis' (1927) he stipulates that the boy-child's first love object is his mother and that the father 'is felt as a disturbing rival and not infrequently viewed with strong hostility.' In his mind the boy strongly desires to procreate with his mother and kill his father, and it is this phenomenon which Freud labels the Oedipus complex. 'We give the whole of this mental structure the name of 'Oedipus complex', after the familiar Greek legend' (32).

In his first postulation of the Oedipus complex in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud makes the by now famous assertion that Oedipus's 'destiny moves us only because it might have been ours' since all of us are perhaps fated 'to direct our first

sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father' (364). This tendency is universalized so that it implicitly becomes a question of 'recognizing' these repressed sexual wishes which lie dormant in all of us. As Freud ardently stipulates, the drama of Oedipus is so psychologically compelling precisely because 'there must be *something* which makes a voice within us ready to *recognize*' (emphasis mine) its full and resonating power (364).<sup>1</sup> The concept of recognition or 'anagnorisis' is certainly tied in with Ancient Greek dramaturgy in so far as the classical dramatists utilized stories which were familiar and easily recognizable to their audiences. According to Rachel Bowlby, recognition 'is one of the components of tragic plots in Aristotle's definition in the *Poetics*.' In the same way as the audience of antiquity were called on to recognize their repressed Oedipal wishes, the 'modern audiences (are compelled to) 'recognize' the relationship of their childhood impulses to Oedipus' destiny' (15). Thus the Oedipal complex effectively allows for a shared past between the audience of Sophocles' time and more modern audiences, a shared past of repressed guilt which moves, along the axis of representation, from one generation to the next in the same way as Laplanche's series of interlocking Oedipal triangles discussed above.

In *The Shell and the Kernel* Abraham and Torok lay claim to a transgenerational phantom which is formed in the unconscious and transmitted from the parent to the child. It is the cryptic and alien inclusion of an other, whose presence points to an unspeakable gap which was unconsciously transmitted to the subject and bespeaks the effects of carrying down familial secrets for generations. It is a phantom which returns to haunt the living and 'bears witness to the existence of the dead buried within the other.' As such, this phantom 'gives rise to endless repetition and, more often than

not, eludes rationalization' (175). The summoning of this transgenerational phantom can be used to explain intergenerational trauma in and even across cultures.

In terms of the recognition of an actual Oedipus complex, it would thus be too simplistic to base Freud's preference for this term on the preconceived notion that the child is in full awareness of such desires. After all, as Michael Feldman points out, even 'in the original story Oedipus did not make a conscious decision to kill his father and marry his mother; the choices that presented themselves to [him and] all the participants seemed to be the best ones at the time' (104). As Juliet Mitchell explains in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, the Oedipus complex institutes culture, 'is expressed within the specific context of the nuclear family' and points to desires which 'are repressed into the unconscious' (377). It would appear that these selfsame desires are apparently repressed at childhood and seem to be almost 'forced' into adult consciousness. In opposition to Laplanche's more formalist and extralinguistic theories – and in a similar humanistic and mythological take on Freud as that employed by Bowlby in her *Freudian Mythologies* – Bruno Bettelheim points out that the term Oedipus complex is a rich metaphor specifically chosen by Freud because it evokes 'the child's anxiety and guilt for having patricidal and incestuous wishes, as well as the consequences of acting on these wishes' (22). According to Bettelheim, in Sophocles' play Oedipus unconsciously repressed these childish wishes well into adulthood. Since as a baby his actual parents, the King and Queen of Thebes, had cast him out to die, Oedipus's unconscious feelings of anxiety and guilt are projected onto his substitute parents, the King and Queen of Corinth. When the Delphic Oracle seals his fate by decreeing that he will kill his father and marry his mother, Oedipus naturally assumes that the reference is to his surrogate parents. He flees in fear, as Bettelheim puts it, 'because he was unknowing of himself' and hence 'believed that

he could murder the father who had raised him so well, and marry the mother who loved him as a son' (23).

Yet although Bettelheim neatly conflates the actual and surrogate parents in this manner, thus allowing for Oedipus's identificatory projection of his unconscious desires onto the latter to function as the trigger which serves to bring on their actual realization in the former, this only serves to blur the distinctions between space and time by posing the fact before the event, in an *a priori* logic which dislocates Oedipus from the very act which he is meant to have instantiated. If he fears for his surrogate parents and unconsciously harbours an Oedipus complex which he has suppressed from childhood, then on what grounds are we to extrapolate that having unconscious sexual feelings for his surrogate mother was identical to having these selfsame feelings for his real mother who did not, after all, nurse him from infancy?

Although certainly Freud deals with the question of what he calls the incest taboo in his 'Totem and Taboo' (1913), a seminal work which examines to what extent Oedipal desires are genetic or biologically determined, his emphasis on a group of brothers deflecting blame onto the father and subsequently committing parricide (and hence ousting the father in order to have full access to the mother) seems to suggest, as Bowlby astutely points out, that 'in the beginning was the battle of the brothers' rather than 'the struggle between father and son' (27). This would ultimately undermine the notion of an Oedipal complex by accenting sibling rivalry more – in true Abel and Cain fashion – than any pre-existing primal fantasies to kill the biological or surrogate father of the tribe and sleep with the mother.

As Juliet Mitchell points out, Freud repeatedly 'made everything come back to the Oedipal or pre-Oedipal parents, in order to avoid [his] dead brother' and the question of sibling rivalry (*Mad Men and Medusas* 239). I am reluctant to

psychoanalyze Freud in this manner and feel that there is a problem with extrapolating this theory of sibling rivalry onto Oedipus's familial circumstances. For while it is clear that Oedipus had daughters who were also his sisters, there is no mention of a rivalrous brother, unless we are to assume that his uncle and brother-in-law Creon functions as a substitute brother.

Whatever the case may be, Bowlby suggests further on in her argument that since Oedipus did not know his real parents, he 'cannot have wished to do what he did, and the play gives no support to the idea of unconscious 'Oedipal' impulses in relation to parent figures' (174). This leads to the paradoxical situation where Oedipus becomes divorced from the Oedipus complex which Freud attributes to him. In a similar vein, John Fletcher points to the 'gap' or lacuna that is created by what he defines as the 'dislocation' between Oedipus's wishes and their fulfilment, between event and protagonist:

The man he has killed turns out to have been the father he has never known and the woman he has married his unknown mother, but Oedipus himself is strangely absent from both these actions of which he is the ostensible protagonist. In the gap created by this dislocation between protagonist and the tragic actions he turns out, only in retrospect, to have performed, the question of the Oracle insists with its brutal announcement in advance of Oedipus's fate (24).<sup>2</sup>

This dislocation occurs precisely because Freud (and Bettelheim in his turn) fails to properly account for the other. Fletcher's Laplanchean reading thus serves to illustrate the fundamental error Freud makes by foreclosing the other (mother?) and moving away 'from a Copernican, other-centred, exogenous model of traumatic seduction' towards 'a generalized Ptolemaic model of endogenous development' (26).<sup>3</sup> The stakes here are obviously quite high, since a shift from an exogenous to an endogenous model would clearly deflect desire from the adult onto the child. This allows Freud to move away from a seduction theory in which the adult is seen as

seducing, or in some cases even physically abusing the child, to an Oedipal theory in which 'children desire their parents, not necessarily the other way round, and fantasize these scenes of abuse or seduction' (Vice 20). Thus Freud's move towards an endogenous model of selfhood is reminiscent of what Claire Stocks has defined as the tendency in Western tradition to delimit and construct identity as a singular, monolithic entity so that the self is not mediated or permeated by the other or others.

As Stocks illustrates, 'fragmented identity' is not 'deemed healthy or desirable' in Western culture (77). Thus it must be expunged and it is often seen as the task of trauma theory to do so by integrating the fragments. Thus trauma theory in and of itself 'implicitly reinforces ethically weighted distinctions between 'good' Western, healthy conceptions of self and 'bad' pathological, fragmented 'others.' Furthermore, these distinctive 'categories are mutually exclusive and function to reinforce the boundary between self and other which confirms the belief in individual integrity' (77).

In stark opposition to this view Laplanche, as we have seen, posits an exogenous model of trauma. It will be recalled perhaps that Cathy Caruth explicitly states that trauma is not simply the trauma of the self or the one but also the trauma of an other. In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* she refers to a wound that has a voice and the power to 'speak' its own trauma, and posits that the story of one's own trauma is linked to the trauma of another (8). The reference to the voice of the other is reminiscent perhaps of the voice which Freud mentions in his *The Interpretation of Dreams* as the voice within us which is ready to recognize our own Oedipal desires. Whatever the case may be, any story of trauma must therefore incorporate the other within its visual, linguistic and theoretical domains.

Stocks is particularly illuminating in this respect in her deployment of Abraham and Torok's theories to foreground the incorporation of the other in theories of the self. For Abraham and Torok 'one's identity is inherently formed around a kernel of an 'other' lodged in the unconscious,' a psychical schema which almost seems to hark back to the earlier Laplanchean model of the enigmatic signifier which is transmitted from the primary caretaker to the child and registers or 'lodges' itself in the child's unconscious (78). When there is a failure or disjunction between the incorporated object and its introjection – that is, where there is a failure on a psychic level to actually register the other or parts of the other – a 'gap' is created 'in the unconscious where the introjection *should* have occurred' (80). As we have already seen, this gap refuses to be assimilated and forms what Abraham and Torok define as the transgenerational phantom, since it is a gap that is replicated and passed on from one generation to the next. This also accords with Laplanche's views, discussed earlier, on the primal transference as being constantly reconstituted and repeated throughout the generations (which is also a reminder, perhaps, of Carl Jung's notion of a 'collective unconscious').

Thus we have come full circle. Yet what these theories of Laplanche or Abraham and Torok seem to imply certainly has grave implications for our (re)reading of Freud's reading of Sophocles' play. It is only by moving back to a Copernican model which resituates the self in a dialectical position to the traumatizing other that the full dimensions of the play's thematic function can be understood. To put it more simply, Oedipus's wishes cannot be foreclosed in some internal vacuum within his own psyche, in the same way as 'Apollo and the Delphic Oracle' cannot be 'treated merely as materializations of Oedipus's own wishes and their inevitability' (Fletcher 26). Indeed, it is precisely this insularity of the Oedipus complex which

Deleuze and Guattari deprecate in their *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. For them the child is not simply involved in its own narcissistic wishes, nor is it attached only to its parent(s). The child is part of a social field or network which regulates and is regulated by capitalist desire, or what they call ‘the machines of desire’:

From his very earliest infancy, the child has a wide-ranging life of desire – a whole set of nonfamilial relations with the objects and the machines of desire – that is not related to the parents from the point of view of immediate production. (48)

In the same way as the child is inevitably part of the relational nexus between the self and larger social networks outside the family, so is Oedipus inevitably part of the social and inter-generational networks of his time which link the human will of the self to the Delphic other. To put it differently, the transgenerational phantom of the Delphic Oracle itself, which is also bound to Ancient Greek beliefs about the shaping of human destiny through divine intervention, is handed down to Oedipus through a long and generational trajectory. Oedipus’s tragedy lies, in fact, in his failure to introject this phantom and thus close the gap between the Oracle’s prophetic/enigmatic message and his own life history.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, this failure to suture the gap registers itself not only on a psychic level. It *literally* becomes a traumatic register which is physically inscribed on his flesh or body through his act of self-blinding, the final act which actually serves, paradoxically, to bind him – even if metaphorically – to the other’s flesh (since it is his dead mother’s brooches which he uses as lethal instruments to effect the deed). Yet what is it that actually spurs Oedipus to commit this atrocious act of self-mutilation? Can it be, for instance that it was borne out of a desire to assuage his guilt? Or was it perhaps an attempt to suture the gap between the other and himself and thus put to rest the transgenerational phantom?

Indeed, I would argue that out of the compellingly diverse range of interpretations which have been offered by literary critics and theorists to account for Oedipus's act of self-blinding, none are more riveting than those which seek to liken this self-blinding to an expressly sexual act which is a virulent doubling of Oedipus's original sin (αμαρτία) of parrincest.<sup>5</sup> When Oedipus blinds himself he certainly does more than simply enucleate his eyes with his mother Jocasta's brooches; for when he repetitively strikes the brooches into his eyes what he lets loose is not only 'a stormy rain of black blood [that] burst like hail' (Sophocles l. 1279) but also a flood of interpretations surrounding the ghastly deed.

As Richmond Lattimore points out, 'Oedipus's self-blinding can be seen from various angles' (47). He further provides two such 'angles' of vision. Oedipus's self-mutilation is a form of self-punishment for his evils but also serves to complete the last stage of the Sphinx's riddle. And, to this it must also be added that it fulfils Teiresias's earlier prophecy that Oedipus's figurative blindness in seeing the facts will later on develop into a blindness in a literal sense. As Bettelheim notes, the literal and figurative are finally bridged in this atrocious act. 'Oedipus acted out his metaphorical blindness – his blindness to what the oracle had meant, based on his lack of knowledge of himself – by depriving himself of his eyesight' (23). It is the blind seer who truly cuts to the heart of inner truth and knowledge, *sees* with his blind eyes that which Oedipus cannot.

That Oedipus blinds himself as a form of self-punishment is already clear. His self-blinding expresses 'a deep-seated urge to make reparation' (Brown 111). As he says before his committal of the deed, it is to be done so that his eyes should no longer 'see in the dark those he should not have seen' (l. 1273), and even when he looks on his deed in retrospect, he shows that it was done out of necessity (ανάγκη),

not simply as a retribution for past deeds but also because in his futural death as he envisions it those deeds must not come back to haunt him in spectral form. When, like a visionary, he looks to his descent into Hades, he poignantly declares that he will not ‘see my father with these eyes’ nor even ‘see my poor unhappy mother [Jocasta]’ (l. 1272-3), for now his eyes – those shameful perpetrators of sin – can no longer see what they must not. In other words, the meeting which is to occur between Oedipus and his parents in the afterlife is averted – and with it the potentiality for a re-enactment of Oedipus’s original crimes – through the intervention of Oedipus’s act of self-blinding. It is extremely telling that as soon as he evokes this fatal and unwelcome meeting between himself and his parents in his mind, he quickly conjures up with it an image of children sprouting like ‘new shoots,’ as though it were impossible to curb his involuntary Oedipal desires – at least, that is, until the removal of his sight: ‘Or is the sight of children to be yearned for, to see new shoots that sprouted as these did? Never, never with these eyes of mine!’ (l. 1375-7).

In these lines then, quite clearly, there is an explicit linkage of vision to sin and the horrific sexual act of incest, a linkage which is seen to recur throughout the play.<sup>6</sup> As Freud points out in his ‘The ‘Uncanny’’ (1919), this linkage can be shown to exist in ‘dreams, fantasies and myths.’ Drawing in particular on the myth of Oedipus, Freud stipulates that his self-blinding ‘was simply a mitigated form of the punishment of castration – the only punishment that was adequate for him by the *lex talionis* [the old Biblical injunction of *an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth*]’ (352).

Thus the eye is substituted for the penis as bodily organ and all feelings of guilt and anger are deflected from the latter to the former. Indeed, if this Freudian interpretation of the blinding as a displaced form of castration is coupled with Mark Kanzer’s reading of the scene of self-blinding, an interesting dynamics is set up. For

as Mark Kanzer points out, the blood which oozes out of Oedipus's eyes 'like hail' is in reality the mirror image or double of the semen ejected in the act of coition, with Jocasta serving as an image of the phallic mother: 'in this fantasy of coitus and orgasm, the sexual act is depicted as a sadistic and castrating attack from the maternal phallus' (qtd. in Rudnytsky 262).

While the implicit sexual connotations in Oedipus's act are certainly not to be denied, there are a number of problems that arise with Kanzer's interpretation. The first of these is that for Freud, at least, it is precisely the fetishistic fantasy of the phallic mother that is meant to ward off feelings of anxiety about castration. While it is true that ambivalence remains in relation to the child's fear of castration from the phallic mother, the boy-child actually identifies himself with her and even refuses to believe in her castration or lack of a penis. In his essay 'Fetishism' (1927) he notes the child's thoughts: 'No, that could not be true: for if a woman had been castrated, then his own possession of a penis was in danger' (153). In later life this idea of the phallic mother or woman is still retained through a substitution of other objects for the fetishized object or phallus.

Thus Oedipus's phallic fantasy, as Kanzer would have it, is an exact reversal of Freud's instantiation of the maternal phallus as fending off castration anxiety. Not only does this fantasy not ward off castration but it also actually serves, in point of fact, as an uncanny mirroring itself of the compulsion-to-repeat the incestuous deed.

The second problem which arises from Kanzer's reading is that it accords primacy, or rather agency, to the mother, thus deflecting from Oedipus's active role in his own castration. In this strange transposition, it is the phallic mother who is seen as attacking Oedipus and effectually castrating him, thus robbing Oedipus of his own agency in the violent deed. Oedipus clearly recognizes his role in the parrincest, and it

is this which triggers his feelings of guilt. He is aware that the deed he has committed is so horrific that he should now no longer 'see in the dark those he should not have seen' (l. 1273) and needs to avert his parents' gaze in the afterlife. He shudders when he imagines this encounter with his parents, for he dreads the look of the other that will undo him. It is the look of *malveillance* or hostility which Foucault saw everywhere and which Oedipus attempts to escape from through his literal blindness. According to Lacan, it is Oedipus's curse to negate his own existence, a negation which reveals the 'true subsistence of a human being, the subsistence of the subtraction of himself from the order of the world' (qtd. in Staten 173).

Whatever the case may be, when the protagonist Oedipus is affronted with the frightful 'possibility' of seeing his parents in the afterlife, such ghostly (re)visitations, which objectively mark an unseen event, manifest themselves as an interior reality in his psyche, marking the traumatic or mimetic moment where meaning and representation break down along the axis of interpretation and the traumatic gap or lacuna between signifier (word/gesture) and signified (message/meaning) widens. It is at this moment that the eye/I of vision is transposed from objective reality into 'inner' vision – or, more metaphorically and topographically, the mind's eye. The sight/site of the tragic event, even if it is only imagined, serves as an ambivalent and traumatic marker on the cusp between perception and representation.

In effect, the audience watching the play is called on to *imagine* this frightful encounter between Oedipus and his parents. Within the play vision occupies an ambivalent status, making it appear at once psychical and social, virtual and real, a matter of both (traumatic) representation and perception at the same time. This is why Oedipus as character-cum-actor can neither be adequately represented nor perceived

by the reader or audience.<sup>7</sup> His (re)presentation necessarily precludes the audience's perception of him. Jean-Pierre Vernant aptly points this out:

As soon as Oedipus has been "elucidated," uncovered, presented as a spectacle of horror for all to see, it is no longer possible for him either to see or to be seen. The Thebans turn their eyes away from him, unable to contemplate full in the face this evil "so frightful to behold," this distress the description and sight of which is too much to bear (119).

This frightful event or 'spectacle of horror' is, of course, Oedipus's self-blinding after he has discovered that he has unwittingly killed his father Laius and married his mother Jocasta. Interestingly, this event, together with Jocasta's suicide, takes place off-stage and is only *belatedly* reported by the messenger to the audience. That this event takes place off-stage is telling. It alerts us to the fact that this event is, perhaps, too obscene to be represented visually, since we know that the very word obscene, in its Greek etymological roots, points to precisely such a state of affairs. However, why would Sophocles relegate such an evidently dramatic moment, full of momentous import, to such a position, forcing the audience to necessarily imagine this event rather than see it performed? It is certainly not the case that Greek tragedians shied away from enacting violent events in full-blown view of their audience. Rush Rehm alerts us to this fact, informing us that we should not subscribe to 'the mistaken notion that all violence in Greek tragedy takes place off-stage.' He cites a number of instances where violence and bloodshed are enacted onstage:

Physical pain, brutality, and even bloodshed do occur within sight of the audience – the hero commits suicide on stage in Sophocles' *Ajax*, the suppurating wound of the title character in *Philoctetes* is constantly before us, the tormented Heracles exposes his pain-wracked body in *Women of Trachis*, and a battered son dies in the arms of his father in Euripides' *Hippolytus* (62).

Thus it is not that violent or bloody events were censored from the stage. It is simply that, in a play so heavily entrenched with issues of vision and sight, the dramatic effect is achieved by recourse to *inner* vision, the inner vision of the

audience who are averted from this event's literal and actual performance and are called upon to visualize Oedipus's self-blinding in their mind's eye. This is in keeping with another theme which runs parallel to the play's motif and trope of sight and serves as its reversal – that of blindness, in both a literal and metaphorical sense.

At the same time as the audience is not granted access to certain events off-stage, they can *see* and understand things which Oedipus cannot, a circumstance which does not in any way diminish the powerful force of the play. As Thomas Gould points out in his appendix to Sophocles' text, Sophocles enriches the play with so many double meanings that Oedipus's final discovery of his sins is overwhelming, even for 'the audience, which thought itself in possession of the secret from the beginning' (175). This creates a kind of double vision.

I use the word 'double' here precisely because I wish to bring out this sense of recurrent doubles and opposites such as vision and blindness throughout the play. Yet the word also has relevance in another sense as well. It is ironic that Oedipus should remove his eyes with Jocasta's brooches after he has *seen* the truth. It is almost as if he needs the other in order to enact this traumatic self-blinding. Thus his act of self-blinding is not an isolated or intrapersonal event; it involves the other, or rather, it *needs* the other for its physical materialization.

That Oedipus is driven accidentally to discover the truth of his origins does not detract from his subsequent and insatiable desire to find out, or rather to *see*, the horrific truth. Like the psychoanalyst, his roving and wandering eye looks back into the past in order 'to decipher the mysteries of the present' (Ellmann 9). Yet, whereas earlier on his single, monolithic gaze had caused him to ignore Teiresias's prophecy, figuratively blinding him to misrecognition of his very identity, it is 'the act of looking' through the eyes of others which allows him, in the main, to identify who he

truly is. As Leslie Hill notes, the act of looking can thus function as ‘an undecidable interplay of proximity and distance founded on the constant merging together and coming apart of bodies’ (163).

Although we have already seen the problems which persist in Kanzer’s reading, in which Jocasta is portrayed as being the phallic mother, it is worth mentioning that such a reading does effectively point to the paradox inherent in Oedipus’s act. Even though Oedipus wishes to punish himself for his crimes, if the letting of blood in his mother’s bed-chamber is seen as an orgasm, then entering the mother’s bed-chamber once more is literally a repetition of the original sin of parrincest. It is noteworthy that Jocasta invokes the dead king’s name before she takes her life – ‘she called to Laius, dead so many years’ (l. 1245) – and that Oedipus, before bursting into the chamber, should ‘[ask] for his spear and for his wife’ (l. 1255-6). Although certainly this outburst could be seen as an intention on his part to ‘kill’ the already dead Jocasta, to wound her with his phallic spear in a ghastly and necrophilic coming together, there is also the added implication that the father fantasmatically returns and needs to be re-killed in order to maintain the dyadic mother/son relationship. As Peter Rudnytsky aptly points out, ‘the self-blinding ... is a ghastly *repetition* not only of Oedipus’s incest but also of his patricide’ (262, italics mine). The two acts are inseparable from each other. Yet their inevitable return (both in fact and in fantasy) again and again, their constant repetition, seems to suggest that there is no way out of this virulent and circuitous impasse of the triangulated Oedipal schema. Indeed, Ronald Britton puts it very eloquently when he states that ‘in this phantasy the arrival of the notion of a third always murders the dyadic relationship’ (100).

Additionally, while there is little, if any, evidence in the play to support Kanzer’s reading of Jocasta as a phallic mother (indeed, she more readily represents

the imago of good mother than anything else), he may not be completely wide of the mark in invoking 'the maternal phallus' as somehow implicated in Oedipus's act of self-blinding. Yet it is not Jocasta who takes centre stage 'in this fantasy of coitus and orgasm' (even though Oedipus uses her golden brooches to induce this 'orgasmic' hail of blood). If there is an 'attacking' maternal phallus, it is embodied in the figure of the Sphinx, 'the winged maiden' (l. 508) who, as Thomas Gould points out in his footnote to the line, with her deadly talons 'killed her victims in a sexual embrace.' While Oedipus destroys her by solving her riddle, that riddle is really the riddle of his own destiny: he will soon have three feet since his blinding shall cripple him such that he will need a 'third foot' or walking stick to support himself. Hence the Sphinx's riddle to Oedipus is an ominous warning, a prophecy which is effectually fulfilled at the moment of Oedipus's blinding. If, in Freudian terms, blinding is the equivalent of castration, then it would logically follow that if the Sphinx blinds Oedipus she is the castrating mother in embodied form, significantly returning in metaphorical (if not visual) fashion to 'attack' him through Jocasta's brooches (which can, perhaps, be read as displaced metaphors for the Sphinx's talons) and thus carry out her prophecy. In the popular imagination she may even have been linked to the evil eye. As Gould points out in his commentary to line 508 of the play: 'The Sphinx was used on shields and helmets, exactly as the Gorgon's head and the great apotropaic eye' (73).

Even if Jocasta is now dead, she rises once more from the grave like the many-headed Hydra, whose heads would grow as soon as they were cut. Oedipus finds himself yet again in a situation where the (m)other fantasmatically returns to take her place in the re-enactment of the tripartite schema of Oedipal relations, just as Oedipus's previous desire for his phallic spear also invokes the dead father to rise from beyond the grave. This return of the tripartite scheme of Oedipus/Laius/Sphinx-

cum-Jocasta can obviously be interpreted on one level as a reproduction of the recurring scene of triangulation (father/mother/son), with ‘the double mother-field’ (l. 1257) serving as the cross-roads for a cross-insemination by both father and son. Indeed, this would accord well with Deleuze’s understanding of repetition as both marked by and dependent on the ‘displacement’ of the virtual object (of affection).<sup>8</sup>

Yet on another level, this tripartite schema can even be retraced, as Karl Abraham indicates, in ‘another [uterine] fantasy, that of encountering the father inside the mother’s body before birth; the fantasy of observing coitus from within the womb’ (qtd. in Rudnytsky 262). Certainly the play supports Abraham’s claims in its description of Oedipus’s violent lunge ‘through the double doors’ and ‘hollow bolts’ (l. 1261-2), which as Thomas Gould notes in his comments effectually ‘suggest[s] that the violence is also somehow sexual.’ Interestingly enough, John Hay makes a similar observation in his anatomico-structural analysis: ‘It may be pointed out, at the risk of seeming too clinically exact, that the two doorways through which [Oedipus] passes ... symbolize both vaginal and cervical entrances respectively’ (qtd. in Rudnytsky 260). Thus the very bed-chamber of Jocasta can be read as a symbolic manifestation of the womb itself which Oedipus must performatively open. Harking back to André Green’s ideas on theatrical space, the womb-chamber is the ‘transgressive’ and ‘invisible space off-stage,’ that ‘radically uncrossable limit’ which the audience cannot see (qtd. in Ellmann 43). The audience is not allowed to see what transpires or takes place in Jocasta’s chamber, neither are they given a glimpse of her actual suicide. Like the enigmatic signifier, there is a visual lacuna or gap in performance, an untranslatable residue which the audience is called upon to decipher.

When Oedipus blinds himself it is almost as if he regresses to a state of helpless infantilism, a voluntary act of castration which now allows him to avert the traumatic

scene of sight in the same way as a boy-child who assumes his mother is in possession of a penis would avert his eyes in horror from the wound of his mother's imagined castration. That Oedipus must plunge into an undifferentiated state of death by re-entering the maternal womb in order to do this is highly suggestive. I deliberately employ the term 'death' here because the fantasy of returning to the womb seems to me to imply a return to a quiescent or inorganic state. It is certainly not to imply that the foetus is inanimate, only to point out that the reversal of this process, that is, the regressive return to an earlier state of things, must necessarily imply a loss, the most extreme form of this being the loss of life itself.<sup>9</sup> It is only through this loss that Oedipus's body can be symbolized or even represented onstage. As Mitchell reminds us again and again in *Mad Men and Medusas*, 'A representation of the body depends on the body being first lost and then regained as a symbol' (211).

In other words, Oedipus is punished precisely because he tried to foreclose the other in his answer to the Sphinx's riddle. The m(other) resists erasure. She is needed in order to provide meaning to Oedipus's history, in the same way as an audience is needed in order to provide interpretative meaning to Oedipus's performative act of self-blinding. The performative action of saying 'man' to the Sphinx was 'a heresy, an error, or an illusion' since not only did it fail to kill the monstrous mother, but it also failed as 'a radical gesture of anthropocentering that suppresses her monstrosity and makes man the measure of all things' (Goux 157). For Oedipus attempts to kill the Sphinx by recourse to reason and only through the power of a single word and without shedding her blood. As Jacobs points out, it is an attempt to expel the maternal body without spilling her blood. 'Jocasta's suicide by hanging is a blood-free affair, as is the Sphinx's leap from the mountain – she simply disappears' (58-9). Thus to give birth to himself Oedipus must 'kill' the other – in short, his act

forecloses the other. And to do this is to ultimately foreclose interpretation and gloss over the enigmatic signifier of sexual difference.

Having said this, it is important to remember that a Greek audience would have perceived and interpreted the actor Oedipus, together with his deeds, in a very different light from a more contemporary audience. The murder of the mother here is only metaphorical. Certainly murder is murder, and the literal murder of a father is enough to stigmatize the doer and shock the spectator. However, it must not be forgotten that Oedipus's father Laius struck the first blow, leaving no choice for Oedipus but to retaliate in self-defence. If this does not mitigate the circumstances of his crime, one should also add that he is unaware of who Laius really is. Over and above this, there is also the important question of the gods to consider. Goux makes the pertinent observation that 'it is Apollo who punishes Oedipus' for his hubristic arrogance in assuming that he can answer the Sphinx's riddle by solely using his own intelligence, and thus without the help of the gods (94).<sup>10</sup> This message would certainly have struck home in the minds and hearts of its Athenian audience in a way that it cannot do so for more contemporary audiences.

Through the lens of performance, cultural and psychoanalytic theory many theorists have either tried to bridge the gap between the theatrical signifier (gesture) and its signified (meaning), between vision and perception, message and conceptual sign or to widen it and open out a plenitude of interpretative possibilities by recourse to various theories concerning the theatre, the self and the other. What must be borne in mind is that such interpretations are modern and would have had little place in Sophocles' tragic theatre. The notion of subjectivity was certainly unheard of in his time, yet it is my firm belief that if we are to appreciate the full richness of Sophocles' tragedy, we should try to recuperate some of the performative magic of his play. In

order to do this, we can only have recourse to theory. And, as Taxidou rightly points out in *Tragedy, Modernity and Mourning*, theatre is intimately linked to theory. ‘Tragedy is theatre and theatre is etymologically linked to *theoria* (*theorein*, to contemplate, to reflect)’ (34).

To consider the theory of the ‘enigmatic signifier’ is to attempt to locate the trauma which lies beyond tragic representation. Obviously there are various ways of perceiving and looking in theatre and in culture. Indeed, one may even consciously choose *not* to look at a particular event, to avert one’s gaze, in order to avert trauma or interpretation.<sup>11</sup> One may consciously choose to avoid assimilation of the performative aspects of the enigmatic signifiers themselves. Thus, while my work is informed by assumptions about the overt content of Sophocles’ tragedy which is within the audience’s visual, perceptual field, it also attempts to avert the spectator’s (and reader’s) gaze from this field in order to examine what lies *beyond* tragic representation, and how this sense of ‘beyondness’ has very real repercussions for the drama’s material and aesthetic representation, as well as for the various responses of its audience.

That there is a limit or partial sealing-off of the visual field for the audience points to the gap between vision and knowledge, creativity and insight. In a similar vein, a process of regressive creativity can be seen at work in Oedipus’s solving of the Sphinx’s riddle. As Marshall McLuhan points out, ‘The Greek dramatists presented the idea of creativity as creating, also, its own kind of blindness, as in the case of Oedipus Rex, who solves the riddle of the Sphinx.’ According to McLuhan, ‘It was as if the Greeks felt that the penalty for one break-through was a general sealing-off of awareness to the total field.’

It is almost as if Oedipus regresses to infantilism after having solved the enigma, what Lacan, as we saw earlier, defined as ‘the subsistence of the subtraction of himself from the order of the world.’ In psychoanalytic terms, Oedipus’s regression can perhaps be seen as a quiescent state which is accomplished through what Freud calls the ‘death drive.’ In his seminal essay ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’ (1920) – henceforth abbreviated to *BPP* – Freud posits a biologically determined ‘death drive’ which leads organic life to its originary inertia; it is the goal of each living organism to tend towards death in order ‘*to restore an earlier [more primitive] state of things*’ (244), a state of ‘quiescence’, and where all inner chemical tensions evaporate:

If we are to take it as a truth that knows no exception that everything living dies for *internal* reasons – becomes inorganic once again – then we shall be compelled to say that ‘*the aim of all life is death*’ and, looking backwards, that ‘*inanimate things existed before living ones*’ (246).

Thus, by recourse to some biological ‘truth’ (whose validity, incidentally, cannot be affirmed through any sound principles which relate to organic matter), Freud postulates the compelling – albeit controversial – notion of a regressive death drive which is linked to concepts of entropy in thermodynamics and serves to unbind the lease on life, ‘to undo connections and so to destroy things.’ Hence that the organism should strive towards its own destruction, or rather that it should *desire* it, is seen as the ‘expression of the most fundamental principle or psychological functioning’ (qtd. in Laplanche and Pontalis’s *The Language of Psychoanalysis* 103). Although in itself an inherently paradoxical formulation, Freud attempts to shore it up by leaning on what he calls ‘the pleasure principle,’ which simply maintains that the organism seeks to increase its pleasure by ‘keep[ing] the quantity of excitement present in it as low as possible or at least to keep it constant’ (*BPP* 220).<sup>12</sup> Thus it would logically follow that the greatest pleasure is to be found in that state where the quantitative excitement is effectively reduced to nil, i.e. death. As a consequence of this, and

although the death drive seems at first to be diametrically opposed to the pleasure principle – or, more effectively, and as the title would suggest, it is a moving *beyond* the pleasure principle – Freud’s final assumption is that ‘the pleasure principle seems actually to serve the death instincts’ (*BPP* 268).

In effect, such a proposition tends to blur the distinctive boundaries between what, on the whole, is conceived as pleasure and what is not. Indeed, the fact that Freud does not resolve the two tendencies but actually blurs them suggests that the analysand – or, for our purposes, the protagonist – is perpetually doomed to retell stories which trigger the pain and horror of the initial trauma in order to try and recoup some pleasure out of the telling and retelling, and perhaps also to construct a meaningful narrative out of a past which was missed precisely because it was not fully assimilated in the first place.<sup>13</sup> As Caruth has occasion to remark, the threat of death is a missed experience. It is only through repetition that one is able to confront the actual trauma of near death and integrate it into one’s own history of survival. ‘Repetition, in other words, is not simply the attempt to grasp that one has almost died but, more fundamentally and enigmatically, the very attempt *to claim one’s own survival*’ (64). And in blinding himself Oedipus paradoxically awakens into the traumatic realization of having passed unwittingly beyond near death and into the very act of living.

### Chapter Three

#### The Horror of Oedipus's Vision: Deathly (Re)visitations, Incest and Desire in *Macbeth*

Shakespeare's tragedies 'are rooted in the tradition of ancient Greek theatre' and its aesthetic or diegetic framework (Vernant 241). In the same way as Sophocles' Oedipus parries death by gouging out his eyes, Shakespeare's Macbeth attempts to ward off death by 'trammel[ing] up the consequence' (I.VII.3) of his dreadful deed and effecting his own metaphorical self-blinding. In the case of Macbeth, to trammel the consequences of murder is to efface all the traces or clues which lead to his person. And, not only to efface these traces of guilt in himself but also to transplant them elsewhere – in the unwitting guards or 'spongy officers' (I.VII.71) sleeping by King Duncan's (death)bed.

As James Calderwood points out in his *If It Were Done*, any acknowledgement of guilt on Macbeth's part after he murders King Duncan will literally translate itself into physical death. He must kill the guards because 'this staves off his own "death" – that is, the revelation of his guilt' and serves as 'the outside physical equivalent to his spiritual self-blinding' (96). Thus, killing King Duncan is not enough. As Lady Macbeth points out, the guards who are by Duncan's bedside must perforce 'bear the guilt/ Of our great quell' (I.VII.71-2).

That Lady Macbeth should speak of guilt when referencing Duncan's murder is extremely apt, and not only for the ironic associations which it later bears on her own fate, which is literally sealed by the doom of her own guilt. As we have seen from Chapter One, the notion of guilt is implicitly tied in with the Oedipal complex; the

child's patricidal and incestuous wishes, as well as the dreadful consequences of acting on these wishes, are liable to stir in the child feelings both of guilt and anxiety.<sup>1</sup>

Yet if the child merely kills the father in fantasy, Macbeth does so in *fact*. He will not merely be sated by 'black and deep desires' (I.IV.51) or 'horrible imaginings' (I.III.138); he will commit the primal deed that will unleash evil and darkness into Scotland and 'ineluctably wound and pollute [its] world' (Long 46). For the murder is not merely the killing of the father in both fantasy and fact – it is the killing of life and light itself. As Shakespeare is at great pains to show, Duncan is the source or fountain of light.<sup>2</sup> He is the bright eye that shines over the 'sunlit world' of Scotland with its green forests and racy rivers. As Michael Long points out, 'the loss of the eye's brightness is a key image of the world's darkening.' By murdering the eye, or 'stabbing at the beautiful, intricate pattern of things,' the world is plunged in a horrific and dizzying darkness (46).<sup>3</sup> Thus after Duncan's death all hell is let loose and chaos reigns supreme. As G. Wilson Knight points out, Duncan's murder and its aftereffects 'are essentially things of confusion and disorder, an interruption of the even tenour of human nature.'<sup>4</sup> Men, beasts and elements alike are affected by what Knight calls this 'deed of disorder (165).' Like Oedipus's killing of Laius, who is both king and father, Macbeth commits 'the most terrible crime against the sacred order that governs human life' (Vernant 121). It is apt that even before Duncan's noble subjects receive knowledge of his bloody death, they can sense that something is awry. As Lennox notes, it was an 'unruly' night with:

Lamentings heard i' the air; strange screams of death,  
 And prophesying with accents terrible  
 Of dire combustion and confus'd events  
 New hatch'd to the woeful time. The obscure bird  
 Clamour'd the livelong night: some say the earth  
 Was feverous and did shake.

(II.III.38-43)

Indeed, it is ironic that Lennox should talk of ‘new hatch’d’ events and a ‘woeful time’ since only a few moments later it will be revealed that his words, insubstantially floating in mid-air as a play of signifiers, will hit their referential mark or signified in the newly hatched event of Duncan’s murder. It is a woeful time indeed when nature goes amiss, and where a falcon can be killed ‘by a mousing owl’ or horses can break out of their stalls ‘contending ‘gainst obedience’ to self-destruct and eat their own flesh (II.IV.13;17). Shakespeare is faithful in this instance to Raphael Holinshed’s *Chronicles* from whence he drew his inspiration for the play. As Holinshed recounts, after the ‘heinous murther’ not only did the sun disappear for ‘six moneths together’ but the murder itself led to ‘monstrous sights’:

Monstrous sights also that were seene within the Scottish kingdome that yeere were these, horses in Louthian, being of singular beautie and swiftnesse, did eate their own fleshe, and would in no wise taste anie other meate.... There was a sparhawke also strangled by an owle (186).<sup>5</sup>

This reference to such unnatural events obviously resonates with Biblical undertones. On one level, the imagery is dark and hellish; on another, it is reminiscent of the Egyptian Pharaoh’s dream in Genesis of seven lean cows gorging on the flesh of seven fat ones. To my knowledge, such a religious connection has not been made in the literature, yet it serves to illustrate the impending catastrophe of doom that prevails when animals devour their own species. As Joseph interprets the Pharaoh’s dream, he points to its prophetic slant in foreshadowing the seven years of famine and suffering that would plague the land of Egypt, since the fat cows which represent abundance and plenty are to be engorged by the symbolic lack which the lean cows represent. Lack of meat for such a long period of time is a grave catastrophe indeed.<sup>6</sup>

In a similar vein, once the god-king dies, ‘then the sun dies, the crops wither, winter comes, animals violate their natural bonds, order collapses’ (Calderwood 83). One is reminded perhaps of Artaud’s poignant and distressingly chilling account of

the epidemic plague which marks the inception of theatre. 'Once the plague is established in a city, normal social order collapses ... The streets are already choked with crumbling pyramids of the dead, the vermin gnawing at the edges' (14). Like Thebes, Scotland is in the throes of a violent miasma and needs a *pharmakon* or *katharma* to purge it. This is where the tragic actor/hero, *pace* Girard, steps in to take the place of the original *katharma*. According to René Girard, it is only the violence of a sacrificial crisis which can cleanse a community of its contagion, and it is a crisis which is allegedly modelled on an original and primal reproduction of human sacrifice with similar cathartic functions. Aristotelian catharsis is achieved both retroactively through the original act of communal violence and sacrifice of a victim on the altar and also anachronistically on the stage. Histrionically, the temple and altar in olden times on which the victim was sacrificed, and which 'substituted for the original act of collective violence', is now replaced by 'an amphitheatre and a stage on which the fate of the *katharma*, played out by an actor, will purge the spectators of their passions and provoke a new katharsis, both individual and collective' (290).<sup>7</sup>

Paradoxically, this collective 'katharsis' is achieved through the expunging of one chosen individual who functions as scapegoat or *pharmakon*. For the community to expel its own violence it must replicate violence, or rather misplace or transfer it *elsewhere*. 'The whole process of mythical formulation leads to a transferral of violent undifferentiation from all the Thebans to the person of Oedipus' (Girard 77). Indeed, the very nature of this aporetic transferral is exemplified by the precariousness of the term *pharmakon* itself, which wavers ambivalently in Ancient Greek between its signified meanings, 'both poison and the antidote for poison, both sickness and cure' (95). The encapsulation of both meanings signifies that it is neither one nor the other exclusively.

I would argue that a similar process is at work in *Macbeth*. The tragic hero Macbeth functions as a *pharmakon* for Scotland's ills, yet it is his indeterminate status between butcher and hero, both sickness and cure, which stymies the audience's reactions, making it impossible to sympathize with him to a large degree or condemn him outright. From the very beginning of the play he is 'brave Macbeth', the valiant warrior who fought the Norwegians 'with his brandish'd steel/ Which smok'd with bloody execution' (I.II.16; 17-8). As Marilyn French aptly points out, 'Macbeth lives in a culture that values butchery. Throughout the play manhood is equated with the ability to kill. Power is the highest value in Scotland, and in Scottish culture, power is military prowess' (244).

Hence Macbeth is very much a product of his own culture. French makes the acute observation that Macbeth is not condemned for being a murderer. Rather, 'his crime is a failure to make the distinction his culture expects among the objects of his slaughter' (244). Macbeth cannot stop killing. King Duncan's murder is certainly a fatal crime committed against the divine, primal father. We are called upon to see it in sacred terms as a breach in nature. Yet, as mentioned previously, Macbeth is a bloody warrior who has just come back from battle as well. King Duncan is not the first person he has killed and he is already steeped in blood in a culture which defines its terms on war and bloodshed. Just like Girard's model of mimetic violence, the virulent cycle of violence which Macbeth unleashes is already a mimetized re(presentation) of earlier events. However, because Macbeth's tragic flaw is that he does not distinguish between those that he kills he must necessarily fall.

Like Artaud's plague which 'takes dormant images, latent disorder and suddenly carries them to the point of the most extreme gestures' (18), Macbeth takes his own gestures to the limit. Thus he must become the sacrificial victim which purges

Scotland of its miasma, at least for the time being, because he broke moral and community laws which circumscribed and targeted violence outside the community.<sup>8</sup> Even within the world of Scotland, ‘a world that maintains itself by violence,’ there must necessarily be a cordoning off of ‘some segment – family, the block, the neighbourhood, the state – within which violence is not the proper mode of action’ (French 244).

Shakespeare alerts his audience of the far-reaching consequences which can result from a breaching or infraction of community rules. Clearly the Elizabethan audience would have been aware of the gross magnitude of Macbeth’s crime. Not only would they have had some possible foreknowledge of the actual story *via* Holinshed’s *Chronicles* before its stage performance, but it is also quite probable that they would have already come prepared with certain expectations regarding the play’s outcome and Shakespeare’s aesthetic technique and handling of tragedy. To kill a king, a father or supreme ruler – what Elizabethans viewed as God’s divine representative on Earth – is a serious crime indeed, and with it must perforce come serious consequences. Yet while according to Murray M. Schwartz Shakespeare skilfully uses ‘theatrical space in tragedy to enact the violent interruption of ceremonial order’ and its bloody aftermath (29), it is arguable whether the final *catharsis* at the end of the tragedy, where order is supposedly restored and Macbeth triumphantly beheaded, is a satisfactory one. Indeed, does a *catharsis* even take place at all?

This is a complicated question, not least because how catharsis takes place has been a subject for endless discussion. When it was revived as a concept in the Renaissance it encapsulated a wide range of definitions, ranging from the most medical to the most literary.<sup>9</sup> To complicate matters further, certain critics like

Stephen Orgel tend to read catharsis as something which is endemic to the actual play as text instead of an outer reaction or psychopathological symptom of the actual audience. ‘The catharsis takes place within the structure of the drama: it is Thebes or Athens, the world of the play, that is purged, not the audience’ (134). This leads him to the conclusion that the Aristotelian doctrine is not at work in *Macbeth* and that ‘it is clear that Shakespeare is far less convinced [...] that the experience of catharsis leaves us in any way reconciled, calm, or happy’ (*The Play of Conscience* 145).

While this is a plausible conclusion, especially in light of the fact that this reading concurs with Orgel’s arguments that Aristotle definitively uses the word in this manner elsewhere in his work, such a reading would clearly diminish the politically incisive brunt of a dramatic text like *Oedipus Rex*, for example. It is difficult to reconcile oneself to the idea that great dramatists such as Sophocles or Shakespeare would leave their audience’s reactions to pure chance instead of manipulating them. As I mentioned earlier, it is highly probable that the audience would have come to the theatre with preconceived expectations of the actual performance of *Macbeth* through Holinshed’s *Chronicles*.<sup>10</sup> Oral tradition in Ancient Greece suggests clearly that the same would have been true of a play such as *Oedipus Rex*.

Additionally, an awareness of the audience’s central role can be attested to from the earliest dramatic performances. It would go against the grain to depoliticize or take lightly the role of theatre audiences in Ancient Greek theatre. Not only the size of the auditorium but also the sheer magnitude of the architectural design and its location bespeak an ideological and political involvement with the *polis* itself. As Richard Schechner points out, ‘The Greek amphitheatre is open, beyond and around it the city can be seen during performances which take place in daylight. It is the city, the *polis*,

that is tightly boundaried geographically and ideologically' (qtd. in Bennett 3). The audience is actively engaged in the performance. Even in Renaissance theatres during Shakespeare's time the audience was actively engaged in the performance. As Bennett notes, although 'medieval and sixteenth-century audiences did not enjoy the power of the Greek audiences,' they 'still functioned in an active role' and could participate 'as actors in the drama' (3). Surely the political implications of this are not to be deemphasized or glossed over.

What is more, it is important to stress at the outset that my reading certainly does not attempt to conflate Ancient Greek with Renaissance theatre. As C. L. Barber points out in 'The Family in Shakespeare's Development: Tragedy and Sacredness,' the Renaissance theatre was a 'new repertory theatre' or 'a new organ of culture, a *novum organum*' which 'was an agent in the historical shift of the Renaissance and Reformation from a ritual and ceremonial view of life, with absolutist assumptions about meaning and reality, towards a psychological and historical view' (195). According to Barber, Shakespeare's tragedies exemplify 'the post-Christian situation' where God and the Holy Family are supplanted by the human family. Clearly this view of theatre is removed away from the Greek notion of theatre and its heavy investment in religious ceremonies and the vengeance of the gods.

As Page duBois laments in her article 'Toppling the Hero: Polyphony in the Tragic City,' our modern readings of ancient plays focus on characterization and 'not on praxis, on action, nor on mutability of fortunes.' In a sense, we are forcing the modern concept of a tragic hero onto an ancient, tragic experience which had no place for subjectivity, and thus 'transferring to the ancient form what soon becomes a modern, individual, internal, and psychological self' (69). This is what Vernant in fact does when he ascribes a tragic flaw to Oedipus and suggests, in an oversimplified

manner, that his downfall is brought about ‘not as the result of external constraints or his own perversity or vices, but because of an error, a mistake such as anyone might make’ (247).

Yet, while an authentic or pre-existing subjectivity cannot be established, this is not to say that the ideological and political implications of these plays should be ignored. As Leslie Kurke astutely observes in *Coins, Bodies, Games and Gold: The Politics of Meaning in Archaic Greece* we should perhaps, as modern readers, ‘see tragedy as a privileged site for competing, multiple constitutions of subjectivity through practice’ (335). Although this effectively isolates tragedy from its context, it is a potential way (paradoxically) of recouping some of the ancient, tragic experience.

At the same time, and setting aside the issue of whether any performance can actually lead to concerted political action, actuating or inciting its spectators to revolutionary acts, I would suggest that the very question of viewing, even before the possibility of action, is in and of itself a political act, and it is this act of viewing which informs and shapes a particular response to the aesthetic and theatrical event.<sup>11</sup> This response is assumed to be a cathartic one. As Elin Diamond notes of catharsis, it is an embodied and collective process, a process whereby ‘the subject is seized by her [*sic*] shuddering body, which mars her [*sic*] rational vision and produces an unhealthy division of self and social being – a division which only catharsis itself can heal and regulate.’<sup>12</sup> Thus the very process of being seized by what Diamond calls ‘the shudder of catharsis’ – a concept she borrows from Theodor Adorno – is not ultra-individualistic but socially contingent, dependent on the other for its embodiment. For ‘catharsis marks and remarks a sentient convergence of body and meaning.’ It is the point where the material body ‘becomes not the body but the *visible* form and *social*

incarnation of the body: that is, an *embodiment*' involving both the actors and the audience (*The Shudder of Catharsis* 154, emphasis mine).

This embodiment is achieved first through the assignment of ontological status and hermeneutic visibility to the body, and then through a (re)marking of this body as a social body which sees the theatrical event. Phenomenologically speaking, 'the activity of watching is an ongoing process of physical adjustment and response to other physically present bodies' (Shepherd and Wallis 194).<sup>13</sup> Thus social catharsis is achieved through the implicit recognition of the audience – *via* the embodied act of watching events unfold both as an individual and collective, social body – that Macbeth's crimes have broken the sanctified laws of both man and God and that retribution is imminent. The actor playing Macbeth must transfer his internal anguish onto the audience if there is to be any emotional release or catharsis. As Marilyn French suggests, Macbeth as actor is called on to convey the objective reality of his emotional turmoil to the audience's perception. 'His sufferings must be suggested by gesture as well as intonation, and understanding of the play is dependent very much on audience perception of his emotional loss and deprivation' (242).

Like Oedipus, Macbeth has killed the father/king and taken his place. What is worse, he has usurped the throne by killing the king in his own house, a gross violation of the Greek laws of hospitality or *philoxenia* since Macbeth's castle was meant to offer the king sanctuary and shelter. Macbeth knows this and so his crime is redoubled. He says of King Duncan: 'He's here in double trust:/ First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,/ Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,/ Who should against his murderer shut the door,/ Not bear the knife myself' (I.VII.12-6).

There are similar precedents of this double bind of *philoxenia* in Ancient Greece. In *Tragedy, Modernity and Mourning* Taxidou notes that although *philoxenia*,

the offering of hospitality and friendship from one male to another, was a ‘great male concept of Greek thought,’ it was ‘tested and contested’ time and time again (124-5). Derrida conflates the Latinized root of host with hostility and Taxidou cites the example of Euripides, who was allegedly ‘attacked by dogs and dismembered by them, at the orders of Archelaos, the King of Macedon, his host turned enemy.’<sup>14</sup> While the concept of *philoxenia* in Ancient Greece extended to foreigners who came to the host country from faraway lands, I find it an apt example for Macbeth’s contravention of the laws of hospitality.

Whatever the case, it is quite clear that for Shakespeare (and the audience) Macbeth’s crime is great indeed. It is an unnatural deed which leads to unnatural events. So terrible and unnatural in fact is this deed that it must of necessity be done in the dark. In an apt causality and circular tautology which links the dark consequences of the murder to its sinister cause – the darkness of desire – Macbeth proclaims that light must not ‘see my black and deep desires;/ The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be/ Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see’ (I.IV.51-3). Darkness breeds darkness, and so horrid is the deed that it *must* be shunned from sight. If it is allowed to see the light of day, then Duncan’s virtues will rise up like angels to ‘blow the horrid deed in every eye,/ That tears shall drown the wind’ (I.VII.24-5).

Hence the deed is to be done at night, when the bright eye shuts itself in peaceful repose and the angels sleep. As Caroline Spurgeon points out, ‘the evil which is being done is so horrible that it would blast the sight to look on it, so darkness or partial blinding is necessary to carry it out’ (166). It is fitting indeed that this pivotal event in the play is neither scripted nor enacted on stage in numerous theatrical productions. The audience is often called upon to visualize King Duncan’s

murder in their mind's eye (as well as the murder of Lady Macduff's son), in the same way as they must do for other unscripted events such as Jocasta's self-hanging or Antigone's acts of covering her brother's grave with earth in complete defiance of Creon's edict.<sup>15</sup> These are obviously crucial – even climactic – events, yet they are not scripted and must necessarily be envisioned in the mind's eye if they are not performed on stage. Upon receiving the news of her husband's impending coronation, Lady Macbeth calls upon the night to come and pall itself 'in the dunnest smoke of hell,/ That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,/ Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,/ To cry, 'Hold, hold!' (I.V.50-2).

This blanket of hell and dark will envelope the whole of Scotland. In Ross's words: 'That darkness does the face of earth entomb' (II.III.9). It is as if this darkness, this godless universe which Lady Macbeth invokes, must inevitably come. And not only is it inevitable, but unstoppable in its tracks as well. It is almost as if Macbeth, as tragic hero, is compelled to his destiny by some higher power and pushed to extremities by an engulfing force which is greater than (and beyond) him. In tragedy it is often supernatural or divine agents which lead to the hero's tremendous self-destruction. In *Macbeth* Michael Long remarks: 'The play's conception of the savage powers that prey on human beings is as awesome as any conveyed by Greek tragedy where [...] we find human beings brought to nothing by forces of irresistible magnitude' (119). This is indeed a very poignant and compelling description. In this case 'the savage powers' which bring about Macbeth's destruction are evidently the supernatural witches who harness the same destructive power as the violent gods in Greek tragedy. Indeed, Long actually refers to Sophocles and his depiction of 'human victims who, like Oedipus or Deianira, are enmeshed in things too powerful for any human being to withstand' (120).

Thus Macbeth unleashes destructive powers through his actions, a criminal error or *hamartia* which, as Jean-Pierre Vernant points out, ‘envelops him and carries him away, swallowing him up in a power that must perforce be beyond him since it extends, both spatially and temporally, far beyond his own person’ (qtd. in Shepherd and Wallis 168). The bloody violence he unleashes is destructive and self-propagating, ‘too impersonal in its workings, too brutal in its results’ (Girard 47).

As Long points out, the witches have implanted something in Macbeth – an overleaping or ‘vaulting ambition’ (I.VII.27) – which ‘begins to ‘unfix’ his hair and ‘knock at’ his ribs, with brute, physical force.’ He seems driven and compelled by some supernatural power to act out his destiny. Thus he is a tragic hero precisely because he ‘is being pulled apart by ‘supernatural solicensing’ while his agitated silences separate him from his fellows’ (71).

Like the Sphinx, the witches occupy a liminal space in the desert heath. They are shadowy, bearded and unearthly creatures whose normal existence is obscure and invisible. As Stopford Brooke points out, they are the ‘fearfully anomalous of physical nature, the lawless of human nature, – elemental avengers without sex or kin’ (160). They ‘incarnate ambiguity of gender. They are female, but have beards; they are aggressive and authoritative, but seem to have power only to create petty mischief’ (French 243).

At the same time, the witches could also represent ‘the outstretched shadows of Lady Macbeth.’ If their power and ‘dangerous’ sexuality depend on masculine anxieties, the play can be read as an account ‘of the Oedipus complex [which is] tragically unresolved’ (Barber 196). Since Macbeth has not repressed his Oedipal desires, he strikes at the fatherly figure and divine creator embodied in King Duncan, an Adamic deed which must inevitably lead to his fall. Additionally, his hubris in

assuming that he is all-powerful and that the regicide and his murderous deeds will not be punished – that as ‘high-plac’d Macbeth’ [he]/ Shall live the lease of nature’ (IV.I.98-9) with impunity – adds to his downfall. Whereas Oedipus had defied the gods by ‘making man the measure of all things,’ Macbeth has defied the moral and sacred order of things by making ‘himself’ the measure of all things and wiping out anyone who stands in his way.

Like the Delphic Oracle, the witches present Macbeth with an array of oracular/ocular apparitions whose enigmatic signifiers he is called upon to decipher. The irony lies in the fact that he attempts to interpret these visions metaphorically and symbolically rather than literally, not realizing, for example, that the first apparition of only an armoured head stands in for his own which shall later on be decapitated by Macduff. When he sees the final apparition, which is a regal procession of eight kings with Banquo’s ghost following suit, he says to Banquo: ‘Thy crown does sear mine eyeballs,’ then demands his eyes to ‘start’ so that ‘I’ll see no more’ (IV.I.113;116;118). The opposition or dialectical interplay between vision and blindness, wishing to see and wishing to see ‘no more’ in the same manner as Oedipus, is a powerful motif that runs throughout the play.

In Act III Scene IV, for example, the interplay between vision and blindness is dramatically brought to the fore through the use of the banqueting table, which serves as one of the most important visual props in the play. ‘It speaks of hospitality and largesse, of the ceremonial of order and degree, of the trust and security of a well-lit, indoor world, safe from the darkness and danger of the night outside’ (Long 12-3). At the same time, it is around this ‘hospitable’ table where the nobles are gathered that Macbeth disrupts the ceremony and breaks the laws of *philoxenia* by hostilely accusing his guests of playing tricks on him when he sees Banquo, whom he has

killed, appear as a ghost in front of him. As Lady Macbeth remarks after the ghost leaves and Macbeth regains his composure: ‘You have displac’d the mirth, broke the good meeting/ With most admir’d disorder’ (III.IV.109-110).

It is around this table that the tense opposition between vision and nonvision is played out. For it is only Macbeth who can see Banquo’s ghost. His eyes and his imagination start playing tricks on him, with the eye/I of vision transposing itself from objective reality into ‘inner’ vision and creating an unassimilable fracture between perception and representation. At this moment, Macbeth cannot understand what he ‘sees’ – the ghost is an enigmatic sign which causes him to psychosomatically and traumatically break down. Although certain productions of the play have attempted to visually reproduce the ghost as a tangible and material entity through the use of winding sheets, there are various productions of the play in which Macbeth speaks in mid-air to an invisible ghost or simply to a stool (*see* Plate 1.6). In the latter productions, the audience, like Macbeth, are confronted with the enigmatic sign of Banquo’s ghost which they are then called upon to conjure in their mind’s eye.



Plate 1.6 ‘Never shake Thy gory locks at me!’ – Bob Peck as Macbeth, Royal Shakespeare Company, 1982.

At this climactic moment in the play, the spectator is called on to identify with Macbeth and to effect what Green calls a ‘movement of identification with the hero (pity, compassion) and his masochistic movement (terror)’ (qtd. in Ellmann 53). Such subjective identification adds to the spectatorial pleasure and heightens the theatrical effect. Such an identification is similar to Adam Smith’s notion of a sympathetic imagination through which subjectivity is constructed in an ethically just society. As Smith explains, it is natural for us as individuals to react in a reflective and sympathetic manner to the plight and suffering of others. If the suffering of another person is physical, then our body will resonate sympathetically to the pain and feel it – even if to a lesser magnitude – as the sufferer does. These psychosomatic reactions are mostly governed by the things we see as spectators. As Smith observes: ‘... the spectator must, first of all, endeavor, as much as he can, to put himself in the situation of the other, and to bring home to himself every little circumstance of distress which can possibly occur to the sufferer’ (qtd. in de Bolla 75).<sup>16</sup>

As David Gervais notes in ‘Shakespeare and Night: The Dream, Macbeth and Racine’ (2002), Shakespeare’s constant references to night and darkness serve to not only define but also universalize Macbeth and his actions. As a motif night ‘helps Shakespeare to push his vision to its limit’ and to make Macbeth’s special destiny ‘a more general instance of the human tragedy. As it is Oedipus, not the Chorus, who confronts the Sphinx [...] so it is Macbeth and not Banquo with whom the audience empathises’ (21).

Thus the audience attests to Macbeth’s distress or neurotic breakdown through empathetic identification. Indeed, there is a build-up of tension since this breakdown is foreshadowed in an even earlier scene in which vision is implicated once again. In the famous dagger scene in Act II Scene I, Macbeth sees the ‘fatal vision’ (II.I.36) of

a dagger besmeared with blood in his mind's eye. It is *visibly* there yet intangible – ‘I have thee not, and yet I see thee still’ (II.I.37). By line 40 the dagger has become ‘palpable,’ causing Macbeth to claim that ‘Mine eyes are made the fools o’ the other senses,/ Or else worth all the rest’ (II.I.44-5).

That the dagger is stained with blood is important since blood, as opposed to milk and maternal goodness, symbolically functions as a sign of military prowess and masculine authority. Macbeth and his wife will literally and metaphorically become steeped in blood, as the dagger scene in Act II is mirrored or paralleled by Lady Macbeth’s attempts to remove the imaginative blood stains on her hands in her famous sleep-walking scene in Act V. Despite her persistent rubbing, the smell of blood will not go away: ‘Here’s the smell of the blood still: all/ the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand’ (V.I.48-9). It is the recurrent conjuring up of the sight of blood which leads to Lady Macbeth’s subsequent neurosis. Even if the blood has been washed away and can no longer be seen, it is symbolically present as a marker of visual trauma.

As French points out, Lady Macbeth’s downfall comes about because she ‘has violated natural law.’ She is undone because she does not ‘uphold the feminine principle’ and it is ‘this failure [which] plunges her more deeply into a pit of evil than any man [*sic*] can ever fall’ (245).<sup>17</sup> While I am extremely reluctant to attribute Lady Macbeth with evil and supernatural qualities, it is undoubtedly true that her invocation of demonic spirits to ‘unsex her’ (I.V.40) and blanket heaven into hellish darkness is charged with excessive, libidinal energy. It is an energy that knows not how to spend itself (and it is this which causes her psychic disintegration and ultimate madness).

Thus it is telling that the erotogenic zone of Lady Macbeth’s breasts should come to stand as not only a liminal threshold of milky goodness and warmth, but also

a violent one of deathly ‘gall,’ a site of opposing tendencies: ‘Come to my woman’s breasts/ And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers’ (I.V.46-7). She is the perfect image of that phallic mother if ever there was one, the mother who will give her breast willingly only to detract it. Like the Sphinx who suffocates her victims in a sexual embrace with her talons, Lady Macbeth will ‘love the babe that milks me’ before dashing its brains out (I.VII.55). Sexuality and death become inextricably bound as the myth of Death and the Maiden, with the milk standing in for both the abject which is tied to death, in Kristevan terms, but also for purified goodness. At the same time Lady Macbeth’s suckling speech is demonstrative of a kind of Kleinian violence in reverse.

Melanie Klein posits that the infant is vengeful of its mother as love-object and ambivalently comes to perceive of the breast as both good and bad or ‘persecutory.’ In its mind, the breast and milk ‘come to stand for’ things such as ‘love, goodness, and security’ which the baby mourns for as being ‘lost as a result of his [*sic*] own uncontrollable greedy and destructive phantasies and impulses against his mother’s breasts’ (148). Lady Macbeth reverses the Kleinian formula by positing her own destructive phantasies first over and above those of the imagined infant.

If at this point the play is interpreted from a Christian theological perspective, as French herself does, the symbology of milk actually ‘represents an embodiment of knowledge, the literal absorption of spiritual enlightenment’ such that the breast milk, as divine blessing, can even serve to encapsulate man’s intimacy with God through the Virgin (Giles 129). That Lady Macbeth expresses no maternal sentiment through her claim that she would ‘dash’ this sacred intimacy or bond with her putative child without a second thought has led several critics such as French to relegate her into an ‘evil’ pit for failing to uphold the ‘feminine’ principle, as if maternity and femininity

could be reductionistically conflated with ‘procreative and nourishing images of babies, children, the female breast, and milk’ (French 245). It is unfortunate indeed that French should evoke ‘Judaean-Christian culture’ (252) in reference to *Macbeth*, particularly since the world which Shakespeare invokes in the play is ultimately pre-Christian.

Whatever the case may be, Lady Macbeth does appear to be ruled by forces beyond her control. Yet if she really is governed by ‘evil’ and unnameable forces which destroy her identity, it is telling that Macbeth too should be controlled by an unnameable power. Indeed, Macbeth is driven to commit the murderous deed even though he has ‘no spur/ To prick the sides of my intent, but only/ Vaulting ambition’ (I.VII.25-7). Of course Lady Macbeth will provide the ‘prick’ or ‘spur,’ yet Macbeth seems to commit the deed only out of pure and dreadful fascination. As Calderwood aptly points out, Macbeth lacks a real motive. The murder is something that just *happens* to him. ‘What I am suggesting is that Macbeth “falls in evil” as other men fall in love’ (49). Like Oedipus, he is seduced by a higher force that traces out his destiny with acute prophetic power. His violence becomes ‘something exterior to man’ and ‘a part of all the other outside forces that threaten mankind’ (Girard 31). Yet whereas Oedipus attempts to escape and run away from his destiny and the proclamations of the Delphic Oracle, Macbeth knowingly walks into the witches’ evil coven in the same way as Lady Macbeth calls on the ‘murdering ministers.’

Indeed, it is almost as if Lady Macbeth doubles Macbeth in his excessive ambition. Like two sides of the same coin, it would seem as though Lady Macbeth’s identity is subsumed into that of her husband’s, so that both feel the same desires, are haunted by the same fears, are tainted by the stain of guilt and blood, and must ultimately perish. This idea is echoed in Freud’s analysis of the play in ‘Some

Character-Types Met with in Psychoanalytic Work' (1916). By referring to Ludwig Jekels, whose study actually remains unpublished, Freud postulates that Shakespeare could simply have split 'a character up into two personages, which, taken separately, are not completely understandable and do not become so until they are brought together once more into a unity' (323).

Similar claims are made by Murray Schwartz, who claims that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth 'are no longer separate psychologically' (29), and Linda Bamber, who posits in *Comic Women, Tragic Men: A Study of Gender and Genre in Shakespeare* that there is no feminine other in *Macbeth*. Lady Macbeth is apparently not an other to Macbeth; thus their two identities or, at least their roles – subsumed under what Bamber calls 'the masculine-historical project' – coalesce:

There is no dialectic between the masculine Self and the feminine Other in these plays [*Macbeth* and *Coriolanus*] because the primary representatives of the feminine are not Other to the hero. They are identified with the masculine-historical project in general and the heroes' own career is particular (92).

While Bamber's reading seems convincing enough, in its neat formulation of the erasure of the feminine other, it leaves a lot to be desired. Her rendering – as does Freud's – of Lady Macbeth as merely the shadow of Macbeth's identity completely does away with any sense of Lady Macbeth's agency. Certainly there appears to be very little that is maternal or feminine in her. Her 'undaunted mettle' (I.VII.73) is chilling and resembles that of Volumnia in *Coriolanus* who likens Hecuba's breast to 'Hector's forehead when it spit forth blood/ At Grecian sword' (I.III.42-3)' (qtd. in Bamber 95). The resemblance of this conflation between suckling and bloody violence and Lady Macbeth's speech quoted earlier in relation to dashing her baby's brains out whilst it was suckling her is all too clear. Yet, that Lady Macbeth does

have the potential for procreative power is brought to the fore by Macbeth himself, who tells her to bring forth or ‘compose/ Nothing but males’ (I.VII.73-4).<sup>18</sup>

Additionally, whereas it is true to say that Lady Macbeth doubles Macbeth to a certain degree, it is also true that she has a very definitive role to play in Duncan’s murder. Whereas Macbeth commits the deed in literal fact and she commits it *only* in fantasy, Shakespeare is at great pains to show that even the thought of murdering Duncan is an evil sin. As Calderwood points out, Lady Macbeth is there at every step Macbeth takes to ensure that he commits the bloody deed successfully. Whilst Macbeth is in the bedchamber, ‘the emboldened Lady Macbeth’ is ‘physically outside listening but imaginatively inside “doing the deed” with her husband’ (45).

Indeed, it is the very fact that this ‘deed’ is unnameable which lends the play such compelling power. It is, as Calderwood very rightly points out, not just a murderous deed but also a sexual act. ‘That is to say, the murder of Duncan is a metaphorically displaced act of copulation between Lord and Lady Macbeth’ (43). If this is the case, then Bamber’s reading is unsatisfactory, not simply because it deprives Lady Macbeth of her very real and potent female agency, but also because, at the very least, it deprives us of the third term, the m(other) in the Oedipal relationship or sexual act. That there is in fact an Oedipal triangle of mother/father/son at work is evidenced by Lady Macbeth’s explicit linkage of Duncan to her own father: ‘Had he not resembled/ My father as he slept, I had done’t. My husband!’ (II.II.14-5). These lines which Lady Macbeth utters may, at first glance, seem utterly strange and alien. Indeed, it is an odd thing that at this very critical juncture in the play, Lady Macbeth should feel signs of compunction or guilt. And odder still that she should allude to her father. And yet she does. And then hesitates. For the killing of Duncan is like killing in one triple swoop not just God, or

even king, but father as well. ‘As we might expect in this tri-minded play, Macbeth’s act is symbolically tripled, becoming an assault upon the Almighty Father, the royal father, and the genetic father’ (Calderwood 91). One is surely reminded here of Oedipus’s killing of his father ‘at a place where three roads meet’ (Sophocles l. 716).

This triple reference is clearly important as a dramatic and diegetic device.<sup>19</sup> There are three witches in the play if we exclude Hecate, whose appearance is minimal throughout the play. We have also seen the tri-fold implications of killing Duncan, whose murder represents deicide, regicide and parricide all at once. At the same time, despite Bamber’s attempts to erase the feminine other, there is a clear triangulated schema or triad composed of King Duncan/Macbeth/Lady Macbeth. What is more, if we are to accept the Oedipal structure father/mother/child then it becomes plausible along a psychoanalytic axis of representation to reconfigure the previous schema and posit that Macbeth kills the royal father to get at the mother, who is represented literally by Lady Macbeth but also metaphorically by Scotland – the desired motherland.

It is highly suggestive that Macbeth’s violent attempts to seize Scotland by brute force and murder should envelop the world in complete darkness. It is almost as if Scotland resists succumbing to his Frankensteinian attempts at harnessing its procreative forces, his constant desire, according to Schwartz, ‘to be that all-powerful woman and to control the means of nurturance’ (29). The play itself is steeped in procreative images which pit the male seed against the teeming, female womb. Yet, as Long points out, the dominant image is male. ‘In a way which is exceptional in Shakespeare’s work, the male-procreative imagery of issue and seed takes pride of place, not the female-procreative imagery of the womb’ (61). Arguably, and from a feminist point of view, it is Macbeth’s desire to foreclose the maternal other which

undoes him. 'The hero [...] can only live with the feminine Other as she is or die from his own efforts to control her' (Bamber 22). Even though Shakespeare's plays were obviously performed for a highly sexist audience during the Elizabethan age, such an interpretation should not be precluded.

At the same time, Shakespeare shows the dangers of violating both moral and natural order and attempting to breach the innermost recesses and 'germens' of nature where the 'secrets of the procreative process are hidden' (Long 60). The 'dualistic cycles' (57) of night and day, as well as the cycles of life and death, are confounded by such attempts. In short, the circadian rhythm of all natural life is disrupted.<sup>20</sup>

This disruption of cycles is foreshadowed in the play from the very beginning. The play opens *in media res* and with thunder and lightning. The witches, who set the scene and the key note of evil, have already met before. Interestingly enough, *Oedipus Rex* opens with Oedipus describing the city of Thebes as 'weighed down with fragrant smoke' (l. 4). The city is 'tossed' about by the plague and 'dies in the fruitful flowers of the soil,/ it dies in its pastured herds, and in its women's/ barren pangs' (Sophocles lines 25-7).

Additionally, although order is restored by the play's end with the accession of Duncan's elder son Malcolm to the throne, the audience does not know whether Malcolm will prove himself to be a worthy king and ruler. Scotland is given a respite but whether 'the snares of watchful tyranny' (V.VII.96) have completely disappeared remains to be seen. Or rather, they remain unseen. The 'fiend-like queen' (V.VII.98) embodied in Lady Macbeth's person may have disappeared, but there is nothing else feminine to supplant her and take her place except the noble 'thanes and kinsmen' (V.VII.91).

Whether catharsis has been entirely achieved is a moot point. As Marjorie Garber explains in 'Macbeth: The Male Medusa,' 'the play itself is transgressive and insists upon the posing of pertinent, thought-troubling questions,' as well as 'resist[ing] easy resolutions' and 'comfortable conclusions' (76-7). At the same time, the audience is divided in their feelings for Macbeth, who is both 'butcher' (V.VII.98) and tragic hero at the same time. It is this ambivalence which serves, finally, to lend this play such a mesmerising and haunting power and to lay it open to ever-new, multiple readings and exciting performance possibilities.

## Chapter Four

Theatrical Space and the Subversion of Gender in *Macbeth* and *Oedipus Rex*

She dreamed she bore a snake,  
 She swaddled it like a baby, laid it to rest  
 She gave it to her breast to suck  
 Blood curdled the milk with each sharp tug.

(Aeschylus, *The Libation Bearers*, qtd. in Jacobs 77)

The phobic object is [...] the hallucination of nothing: a metaphor that is the anaphora of nothing (Kristeva 42).

What Julia Kristeva describes in her book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* as a phobic hallucination is seen as being both a metaphor and an encapsulation of a drive which, according to Kristeva, ‘has an anaphoric, indexing value, pointing to something else, to some non-thing, to something unknowable’ (42). Paradoxically, it is precisely this reference to the phobic power of the ‘non-thing’ which serves to usher in not only its haunting power but also its ability to function as a ‘something’ which can be both symbolized and represented within a referential and spatial framework. This chapter sets out to explore how this non-thing is a gendered entity which phantasmatically returns to haunt the male imaginary in various dramatizations of two canonical plays, Sophocles’s *Oedipus Rex* and Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, within the performative space which is theatre. It is my contention that the woman’s absence in theatrical performances, as a symptom of *gynaecophobia*, misogyny or more general fears of her ability to effeminize and emasculate male actors will, paradoxically, point to her very real spatial and performative presence both on and off the stage.

It is a well-known fact that there were no women actors in antiquity on the Ancient Greek stage and in Renaissance theatre. As Taxidou notes in *Tragedy, Modernity and Mourning* there is a repudiation of the feminine on the Athenian stage, albeit a repudiation ‘that always returns to haunt [it]’ (174). The convention of employing male actors to play women is already well-established in the literature, although strong claims have been made for female members in the Greek audiences. Similarly, English Renaissance theatre also made use of this convention of employing male actors to perform female roles. Although Stephen Orgel tries to dispute this fact in his *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare’s England*, he is willing to permit that there was a general tendency to exclude and even prohibit women from the stage. The reason he cites for this is an interesting one; women were prohibited on stage because ‘their chastity would thereby be compromised, which is understood to mean that they would become whores’ (49).

Thus the woman’s theatrical presence is seen as being dangerous precisely because it is inextricably linked to her sexuality, a sexuality which is envisioned in dark, negative terms. Knight is quick to associate Lady Macbeth with demonic possession, saying of her that ‘she is a woman possessed – possessed of evil passion.’ He calls this demon which takes hold of her ‘an evil *something* which masters her, mind and soul,’ ‘a nightmare *thing* of evil’ (167, emphasis mine) which he fails to adequately define. This ‘thing’ or ‘something’ which liminally hovers above the text is nameless and all the more horrifying because it eludes proper definition. And it is not only Knight but also women writers who are quick to follow suit in making such interpretations.

As Bamber points out, Shakespearean tragedy is saturated with images of evil, dangerous women or ‘nightmare female figures’ (2). She associates this with

Shakespeare's misogynistic stance since he 'projects aggression and cruelty onto the feminine' (19). Although this is a dangerous assumption, not least because it psychoanalyzes Shakespeare and fails, in its reductionistic manner, to acknowledge the complex female characters he creates, it is often the case in performance that 'the woman [becomes] the microcosm of the tragic, eccentric outside world' (23).

This is a similar move to the one Freud makes when he relegates women and their sexuality to some dark and obscure Minoan age of civilization. In order to keep the male subject's phantasy of phallogentric power intact, the female body does not only disappear from the stage, but it also disturbingly acquires negative and sinister connotations. This is in keeping with Madelon Sprengnether's view in *The Spectral Mother: Freud, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis* that for Freud the woman as mother is not only a procreative force associated 'with the beginning of life but also with its end, so that the figure of the mother fuses with that of death' (5). In order to avoid this, the male subject will strive for mastery over the female, maternal body, asserting his power in such a way as to kill, metaphorically and/or literally, the body of the mother which is associated 'with the ultimate undoing of masculine striving and achievement' (5).

This struggle for mastery over the female body takes place within the actual and metaphoric space of the theatre. Yet the mother or female other resists a literal effacement, and her presence is literalized even within her theatrical and performative absence. Incidentally, the 'feminizing' aspect of theatre itself can account for Stephen Orgel's observations that several antitheatrical writers are afraid that theatre will lead to 'a universal effeminization' and arouse homoerotic feelings or sexual licentiousness in its spectators (29).

Absence (such as spatial absence) does not necessarily imply non-presence. As Sprengnether notes, the mother ‘has a ghostlike function’ in Freud’s Oedipal theory, ‘creating a presence out of absence’ (5). Thus although traditionally in Western philosophy and theory the character of Oedipus has almost always been accorded primacy, hence marginalizing the position Jocasta occupies in the play as both mother and sexual partner, I would argue that Jocasta reclaims agency through the very real potency of her sexual power and dynamic relationship to her son-cum-lover-cum husband Oedipus. Although Bowlby reads her as a figure of absence who ‘is hardly present herself as an agent in the events she recounts’ (177), it is her literal non-presence which paradoxically attests not only to her metaphorical presence but also to her subversive potential. She is ‘a figure of subversion, a threat to masculine identity as well as to patriarchal culture’ precisely because she refuses to go away but remains to ‘[haunt] the house of Oedipus’ (Sprengnether 5).

Sprengnether defines her as having a ‘spectral’ effect, ‘in the full etymological sense of the word’ since spectral is linked to looking, spectacle, suspicion and even appearance. At the same time, the word spectre implies ‘a ghost, a phantom, any object of fear or dread.’ For Freud all of these associations would have been relevant in his representation of the pre-oedipal mother who is ‘the object of his fascinated and horrified gaze, at the same time that she elicits a desire to possess and to know.’ Even as she disappears and ‘frustrates his attempts at grand theory’ she still manages to lure and seduce him ‘like a *fata morgana*, into the mists of metapsychology’ (5).<sup>1</sup>

As Oedipus points out, his ‘poor unhappy mother’ will return in the afterlife (l. 1373). Arguably, this is so because Oedipus has failed to kill the mother literally. And if we interpret the Sphinx as a metaphorical displacement of the maternal Other, as many critics have tended to do, then we can agree with Jean-Joseph Goux that

Oedipus's performative action of saying 'man' to the Sphinx as an answer to her riddle was 'a heresy, an error, or an illusion' since not only did it fail to kill the monstrous mother, but it also failed as 'a radical gesture of anthropocentering that suppresses her monstrosity and makes man the measure of all things' (157). Taxidou makes a similar point when she points out in *Tragedy, Modernity and Mourning* that Oedipus's ascension to 'manhood' does not do away with monstrosity and horror' since the Sphinx still haunts Oedipus after her 'death' – he internalizes her and 'now carries her murder inside him like a miasma' (53).

In other words, Oedipus's punishment arises because of his attempts to foreclose the maternal other in his answer to the Sphinx's riddle, attempts which are met with resistance and ultimate failure. Man cannot act alone. Oedipus ignores this, and Freud follows suit. Indeed, many feminist and literary critics have pointed to the fundamental error Freud makes by foreclosing the other/mother and moving away from an other-centred and exogenous model towards a generalized and endogenous one. Freud moves towards an endogenous model of selfhood and development by asserting that Oedipus – and by extension all of humanity – desires to kill the father and marry the mother. However, this model is fundamentally flawed from the outset since, as Rachel Bowlby astutely points out, following Jean-Pierre Vernant's reading in his influential essay 'Oedipe sans Complexe' (1967, *Myth and Tragedy*), Oedipus did not know his real parents (174). Thus he cannot possibly have the Oedipus complex which Freud attributes to him.

What this means, in spatial and conceptual terms, is that Freud's schematic Oedipal phantasy and structure, which accords primacy to the male's unconscious wishes yet fails to take into consideration any references to matricide or even the very real and potent agency of the mother, can no longer serve as an adequate model of

identity formation. This is precisely because this male-dominated and ‘phallogocentric mode of signifying the female sex,’ as Judith Butler put it after [Luce] Irigaray, ‘perpetually reproduces phantasms of its own self-amplifying desire’ (qtd. in Schneider 96). Thus what is needed is the formulation of another structure to explain how Jocasta, and later on Lady Macbeth in turn, resists assimilation into the oppressive, dyadic binary of Freudian phallogocentrism. Amber Jacobs points to such a spatial model when she introduces a matriarchal law and a maternal structure with its own logic and structuring power that can co-exist within the symbolic order.

Although, according to Irigaray, the woman is in an abandoned state of dereliction because she cannot express or have access to her own desire, Jacobs posits that by allowing the female subject to meet her structural desire it is possible to ‘counter the domination of the patriarchal symbolic economy and provide her with a position within the social-symbolic world which would not reduce her to the state of dereliction that Irigaray has persistently diagnosed’ (30). I would like to suggest that such a reading, which allows for the creation of a new space (through theatre) or symbolic realm with its own structuring processes, makes it possible for feminine characters such as Jocasta and also Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth to be accorded their own subjective agency by subverting traditional genderized roles of heteronormativity, even heterosexuality.

The female’s performative role is wrested away from the maternal and notions of nurturance, which are defined as naturally feminine constructs within the phallic binary system. In *Oedipus Rex* the phallic mother is displaced onto the figure of the Sphinx, who serves as a maternal foil to Jocasta, whereas in *Macbeth* the explicit linkage of nurturance and the phallic mother in Lady Macbeth’s famous suckling

speech is all too clear. It is this image of the phallic mother which constantly resists erasure and simply refuses to go away.

Even if Jocasta is now dead, Oedipus finds himself yet again in a situation where the (m)other fantasmatically returns to reassert her sexual desire. It is telling that this is done by evoking the Sphinx's sexual and destructive powers. She is, after all, the phallic mother *par excellence*. When Oedipus uses Jocasta's brooches to remove his eyes, he can no longer see his incestuous desires yet he has failed to kill or foreclose maternal desire, only to open it out through the jouissance of his literal blinding, that climactic moment when sexual pleasure has 'tip[ped] over into pain and psychic dissolution' (Benstock 16) and there is a *traversal* of subject and object (of desire). The Sphinx may have leaped off the hill and out of sight but she has not leaped out of the frame of representation. And neither have the witches.

In a Latin-American version of *Macbeth* the playwright León Felipe shows how the witches continue to 'haunt' Macbeth even after his death by taking his corpse to a ravine and claiming that he has an 'appointment' with Hell, while in other productions of the play the witches themselves are not presented as ugly, wayward hags but as beautiful and dangerous seductresses who may or may not appear in final scenes of the play.<sup>2</sup> Such representations change the audience's perception but also point to the difficulties directors may have in visually representing the witches on stage without making them seem too stilted, exaggerated or overly sensational. Whatever the case may be, their haunting power resonates throughout the play and until the very end.

It is also important to remember that audience perceptions will differ according to gender, class and race. As Jill Dolan points out, there are 'varied responses of spectators mixed across ideologies of gender, sexuality, race, and class' (121). She refers to the role played by the lesbian spectator in subverting and disrupting 'the narrative of gender ideology' as well as 'break[ing] the heterosexual contract that

informs representation and the enculturation of gender'(101). Although clearly the position of the lesbian subject is not the *only* radical spectatorial position which can subvert representational forms of gender, it seems that Dolan's reading, in seeking to pressure the 'male narratives of desire' by showing how women can denaturalize and even exceed 'the genderized representational apparatus' through their performative practices (101), can provide a useful backdrop against which to read narratives of female desire as well as various performance strategies which serve to 'break' the heterosexual contract.<sup>3</sup>

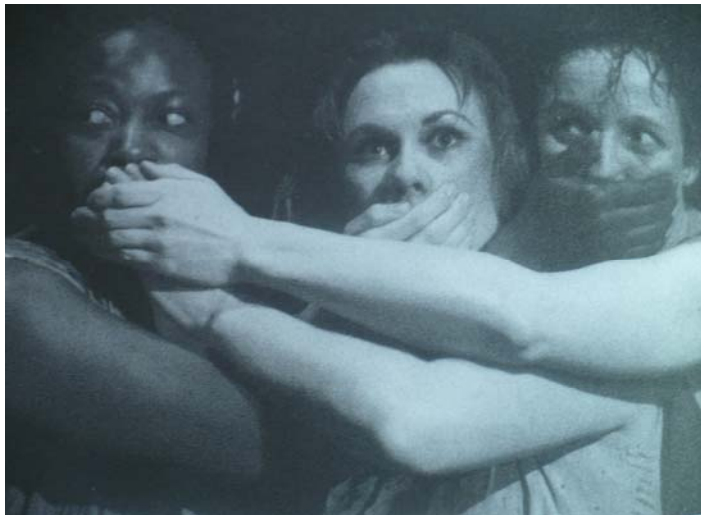


Plate 1.7 'Fair is foul, and foul is fair' – Aicha Kossoko, Amanda Harris, and Joyce Henderson as the three witches, Battersea Arts Centre, 2000.

It is my contention that Jocasta and Lady Macbeth exceed the genderized representations ascribed to them by patriarchal discourse and that any performance in which they are represented should attempt, at the very least, to be a strategy of intervention, showing how the two female protagonists are able to break out of the traditional mould of theatrical form and social conventions to impose their presence *as women*. Such a strategy can be empowering for many female spectators.

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Significantly, when Macbeth hears of Lady Macbeth's death towards the very end of the play, he refers to imagery linked to sound, time, movement and the theatre in order to show how life is like a stage on which the curtains must sometime close. Yet Lady Macbeth's memory will live on perhaps until 'the last syllable of recorded time' (V.V.21). It is significant that Macbeth – and presumably the audience too – does not *see* her actual death but only hears of it from an officer. Like Jocasta, whose suicide is pronounced by the Chorus, the death of the female protagonist Lady Macbeth is left to the audience's imagination. This is also the case with one of the most powerful moments in the play – the famous suckling speech in which Lady Macbeth traduces her maternal role as nurturing mother. The audience is left to their own imaginative devices when envisioning this imagined scene.

I read this moment as an example of Lady Macbeth's subversion of the typical gender-specific position of the oppressed female subject in patriarchal discourse. By masculinizing herself and suppressing her maternal instincts, Lady Macbeth is able to open the space for a new symbolic and interpretative realm which can account for her own desires. As Stephanie Chamberlain points out in an interesting article entitled *Fantasizing Infanticide: Lady Macbeth and the Murdering Mother in Early Modern England*, the mother had an ambiguous gender status because she 'could undermine patrilineal outcomes,' a factor which 'contributed to a generalized cultural anxiety about women's roles in the transmission of patrilineage.' Maternal agency engendered social and political anxieties because it could alter patrilineage 'through marital infidelity, nursing, and infanticide' (73). This led to fears and anxieties about the female body and wet-nursing in general, a dread 'that breast milk could be tainted through bodily disease or ethnic impurity as well as economic deprivation' (74).

Such contemporary anxieties and concerns are transferred on to the stage by Lady Macbeth. Additionally, very real anxieties about constructions of sexuality and gender are also brought to the forefront of the audience's conscious perception. In material, aesthetic terms it must not be forgotten that men and young boy actors played female roles on the stage. Thus a young boy would have played the role of Lady Macbeth, a situation where a boy is playing a woman who is – at least in this instance – masculinizing herself in order to spur Macbeth to assert his 'manly' courage and determination and kill the king. Thus when Macbeth falters to commit the regicide, Lady Macbeth bursts out with, 'When you durst do it, then you were a man;/ And, to be more than what you were, you would/ Be so much more the man' (I.VII.49-51). Thus Lady Macbeth equates manliness with masculine prowess and violent, blood-thirsty murder; to kill the king is to become the man. That Lady Macbeth should show these qualities rather than her husband is heavily ironic, pointing to the blurring and fluidity of traditional and stereotypical genderized roles and conventions.

This fluidity is also typified in the very body of the actor playing Lady Macbeth, who must put on the clothing of a woman in order to enact a 'masculinized,' performative role. This brings up all kinds of questions and fears about the tendency of cross-dressing and transvestism to emasculate the actor, together with anxieties relating specifically to homosexual desire. As Orgel points out, there were arguably very real fears that male spectators would be drawn to the male actors performing women's roles. However, 'English Renaissance culture [...] did not display a morbid fear of homoeroticism as such; the love of men for other men was both a fact of life and an essential element of the patronage system' (35-6). Indeed, it seems that the homosexual love displayed between men may have been normalized in the same way

as the Ancient Greek concept of *philia*, a male conception of gender and sexuality that even serves to relegate heterosexual relations to a tainted, aberrant position.

The tension lies precisely in the fact that women could not be eliminated or effaced from this ideal, homosexual scenario. As Taxidou aptly points out, ‘the shift towards a more patriarchal-nuclear type of family model creates a crisis in systems of kinship, lineage and inheritance’ (*Tragedy, Modernity and Mourning* 173). Furthermore, such a ‘tension between the necessity of women as child bearers, and the power that that may (or may not) bring with it, and the predominantly male function of [homosexual and homosocial] desire create one of the most significant tensions within Athenian tragedy’ (173). Transposing such a formulated proposition onto the English Renaissance theatre, and particularly in relation to Shakespeare’s play, would certainly afford an interesting reading, not least because of the heavily inflected irony that dominates the play, considering which Macbeth continually misses and fails to see; the metaphorical message which Lady Macbeth is prophetically proclaiming to him in this maternal scene which involves the ‘dashing’ of the baby’s brains is precisely a literal rendition of the dashing of Macbeth’s hopes for a future son to carry on his patrilineage – a message Macbeth fails to pick up or consciously register. Lady Macbeth is barren; she will fail to perform her ‘maternal’ function and provide Macbeth with the son he so desperately craves for.

In such a way Lady Macbeth too, like Jocasta before her who metaphorically returned as the phallic mother, will open up the interpretative field and the possibility of another spatial and discursive site or symbolic structure within gender discourse analysis and theatrical discourse. In my view, both women reclaim their agency *via* performance and through the very real potency of their sexual power, and thus

manage to overturn the typical, gender-specific position of the oppressed female subject assigned to them in patriarchal discourse.

As Judith Butler points out in *Bodies that Matter* sex cannot – and should not – simply be seen as a kind of voluntary performance of gender and prescribed gender roles. She reiterates that sex is to be construed ‘no longer as a bodily given on which the construct of gender is artificially imposed, but as a cultural norm which governs the materialization of bodies’ (2-3). Biological models of sex are no longer adequate and the heterosexual matrix of gender and sex norms prescribed by society no longer holds.

According to Butler, this matrix is a ‘hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility’ which is socially constructed, naturalizes bodies, desires and gender and ‘assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality’ (*Gender Trouble* 151).

What I have tried to suggest in this chapter is that Jocasta and Lady Macbeth subvert this heterosexual matrix through their performative practices and disrupt any fixed notions of a stable gender. While it is true to say that this subversion of gender will lead to madness, in Lady Macbeth’s case, and then death for both these female characters, at least it allows them to die within their own terms, and having resisted the oppressive roles assigned to them within the male imaginary. Like Jocasta, it is Lady Macbeth who has the final word, and that final word, although it is not ‘woman’, is not ‘man’ either but death.

## Chapter Five

Orlan's Gruesome Theatre: Religion, Technology and the Politics of Self-Mutilation and Violence as *Gestus*

I make images which almost make us blind. My work stands between the folly of seeing and the impossibility of seeing.

Like Medusa, Orlan knows that certain images compel most people to close their eyes, the eyes becoming 'black holes into which the image is absorbed willingly or by force. These images plunge in and strike directly where it hurts...'

(Orlan qtd. in Knafo 145)

As one watches Orlan's Carnal Art documentary (2001), in which Orlan playfully recites excerpts from literary and psychoanalytic texts in front of a camera while a group of certified surgeons jab her with needles in order to perform 'reconstructive' cosmetic surgery on her face by slashing across her skin, 'slic[ing] open her lips, and, most gruesomely of all, sever[ing] her ear from the rest of her face with [a] scalpel,' one is likely to experience an unsettling feeling of malaise, at the very least, or a sense of physical and/or emotional shock (Davis 454).<sup>1</sup>

For the French multimedia performance artist, who repeatedly splays and parades herself on the operation table – what (in a gruesome pun) she refers to as an 'operating theatre' – this drastic refashioning or cut under the surgeon's knife allows her to come closer to a coincidence or consonance of body and language, outer perception and inner essence or identity. The surgeries are thus (en)acted in order to achieve a greater unity between possession (the 'what I have') and being ('what I am'), 'in order to become fully being, in order to become Being "such as it is"' (Merleau-Ponty 66). To quote Orlan from her Carnal Art documentary directed by Stéphane Oriach, skin itself 'is superfluous since possession and being do not coincide [...] I never have the skin of what I really am.' In order to suture the inherent gap or

dichotomy between actual reality and lived, perceptual experience, *being* and *having* (or *feeling* and *having*), Orlan repeatedly tears or opens out her own body, placing it on public display for the other or spectator and subsequently imploding any notion of a natural body. The body is or becomes fictional and socially constructed. It is mere skin, and skin can be restructured and reshaped in accordance with our own will: ‘In the future, bodies will become increasingly insignificant – nothing more than a “costume,” a “vehicle,” something to be changed in our search “to become who we are”’ (Davis 458).

In this sense, viewing the body as a physical vehicle for living precludes viewing it as a sacred and religious temple invested with the Holy Spirit. Rather than viewing the body as self-contained and impermeable, this way of viewing the body opens out its discursive potential and reclaims it from the hermetic sealing-off of discursivity which the religious model of the body implies. It also resituates agency onto the individual who ‘inhabits’ his or her own body, and who can thus fashion and refashion it at will by divesting it of its transcendental status – the body as transcendental sign of the Name-of-the-Father – and rooting it concretely in the material and linguistic realms of representation.

It will be recalled that for Bergson the body is a vehicle of choice. The very term ‘vehicle’ obviously connotes movement. The body, as a vehicle, can be used and reused at will in Orlan’s experimentation with various identities. It is in constant flux, what Renata Salecl designates as ‘a changeable work of art’ over which she has seeming control (169). Yet before turning to the aesthetic implications of Orlan’s performance, or even before examining in more depth the social implications of Orlan’s ‘body art’ *per se*, I would like to linger a little on her assertion that she experiences no physical (or emotional) pain during her surgical operations, that her

body is ultimately divorced from any materialist base or subjectivity. In her attempts to objectify the body – from the very moment, in fact, that she discards or renounces any notion of physical or psychical pain – Orlan transforms or reduces it into a semiotic function or abstract sign. Her project can be viewed as being based on a binary between semiotics and phenomenology where substance – the very experience of existing in a body – gives way to semiotics and where the vital and living body becomes for Orlan a mere conceptual or abstract image that is open to representation.

Such a reading is reminiscent of that undertaken by Jean Baudrillard in his highly evocative analysis of J. G. Ballard's compelling sci-fi novel *Crash*, whose main protagonist Vaughan constantly (en)acts and re-enacts car crashes and simulates the postures of wounded bodies as they are captured by his camera. Like Orlan, Vaughan, although a fictional character, documents his performances. And, whilst Orlan uses the surgical object as a technological intervention into her own body, the protagonist in *Crash* uses the metallic-body of the car to effect his own body's dissolution into an abstract surface or concept, which is further mediatized by the photographic image – a medium of technology to which I shall shortly return.

For the moment it is interesting to note that in Baudrillard's postmodern reading of Vaughan's bloody histrionics, 'the entire body becomes a sign which offers itself in the exchange of body language.'<sup>2</sup> There is nowhere any sense of the body's organicity in this symbolic exchange of body language, that is, the exchange of signs which occurs between the body of the car or, in Orlan's case, the surgical instrument (if one takes the conceptual leap and is willing to make the transposition) and the body of the subject, not even when the body is impacted on, and thus transformed, by the automobile or surgical object. As Baudrillard makes clear:

It is all identical: all shocks, all collisions, all impacts, all the metallurgy of accidents is

inscribed in a semiurgy of the body – *not in anatomy or physiology*, but in a semiurgy of contusions, scars, mutilations, and wounds which are like new sexual organs opened in the body.

(*Two Essays*, emphasis mine)

Divorced from any anatomico-physiological setting, the body is ‘reduced to the symbolic exchange of signifiers’ (Harris 74). At the same time, in its process of ‘becoming,’ it also engenders the creation of a new ‘semiurgy’ or abstract system of signs. And, as the wound is part of the body, it too is subsumed into this system, becoming what Baudrillard calls a ‘symbolic’ wound, one which is deinvested of libidinal cathexis and functions merely as abstract or disembodied sign. As such, it is disseminated along the semiotic system like a signature, infinitely reproducible and infinitely prone to simulation. And, as Jacques Derrida aptly points out in *Margins of Philosophy*, signatures function only in so far as they are repeatable or ‘iterable,’ and thus able to be repeated in several different contexts: ‘In order to function, that is, in order to be legible, a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form; it must be able to detach itself from the present and singular intention of its production’ (328). Hence signatures, like wounds, can be endlessly counterfeited, imitated and simulated.

For Derrida experience in general is always already marked (paradoxically) by both iterability and erasure, repetition and loss, and whilst it is clearly beyond the scope of this work to fully engage in a Derridean philosophy of difference and deconstruction, suffice it to say that his notion of a signature – or, what I would like to call a wound-as-signature – may shed some light on Orlan’s cosmetic surgeries as staged performances. In one of Orlan’s exhibitions in particular, a progressive series of forty photographic images of her facial surgical wounds are displayed for public view. These seriated photographic images show the capacity for the wound to be reproduced and simulated *ad infinitum* through the mediatization of the camera and the openness

of Orlan's body towards the other and the other's field of vision, her attempts to make her wounds a sharable event – a collective spectacle, in short, rather than a private ideal.<sup>3</sup>

Orlan's body is thus opened out, it 'offers itself to [representation], opens upon... an imminent spectator, is a *charged field*' (Merleau-Ponty 264).<sup>4</sup> It is a charged field, in other words, to the extent that it opens itself to representation and the other's gaze, implicating itself in a dialectical movement where violence functions as a kind of social *gestus* and feeds into an attempt to destabilize constructed identities. Orlan is constantly 'trad[ing] among shifting, constructed identities, layered on a body that has experienced all of these constructions.' Her performance arguably functions as 'a noncoincidence of body and language, a Brechtian, postmodern dissociation of presence and discourse.'<sup>5</sup> Yet, before attempting to reclaim Orlan's performances by foregrounding them in a kind of historico-materialist discourse or gestic feminist criticism (assuming, of course, that this is even possible or desirable), I would like to pause once more over Orlan's complete negation of pain and her complete disavowal of the subjective body.

In effect, Orlan's belief in the complete obsolescence of the human body allows her to assume (even if phantasmatically) the position of a 'posthuman self where a multiplicity of selves are constantly shifting and in motion' (Ashby 48). I say phantasmatically because there is no way to avoid humanism – and paradoxically so – when positing the posthuman condition. It is all very well, *pace* Derrida, to say that the 'post' in humanism is always already returning, that this movement is in effect always taking place, but it is also the case that there is no clear way out of this very impasse. 'There is no pure outside to which 'we' can leap. To oppose humanism by

claiming to have left it behind is to overlook the very way that opposition is articulated' (Badmington 9).

What this means is that despite Orlan's protests to the contrary, she needs the body in her performances, and the body feels pain. For while Baudrillard sees wounds as primarily 'symbolic' and semiotic, as disembodied artefacts or signs which circulate in a semiotics without any meaning, it is my contention that Orlan's gaping wounds, the open orifices she exposes in her photographic images, delineate a very precise economy of pain frozen and petrified in time. Indeed, the fact that the wounds themselves may be read as abstract signs does not preclude them from *also* being or becoming embodied, 'real' events. They may possess an ambivalent status, in their attribution as at once psychological and social, virtual and real, a matter of both representation and perception at the same time, yet it is not easy, perhaps even impossible, to relegate the body to some pre-subjective or even pre-objective state of being. (I am reminded here of a kind of Husserlian *something*, the *something* of consciousness, the consciousness of, which we cannot extricate ourselves from.)

As I mentioned previously, the body feels, even lives, pain. It is not so easy to abstract it from its materiality and root it in some conceptual or even pre-ontological discourse of semiotics. Indeed, the very question of semiotics, of language itself, presupposes the existence of the body, even if only as referential, material sign. As Lacan notes in *Écrits*, 'language is not immaterial. It is a subtle body, but body it is' (95). After Orlan's 'cosmetic' operations, she is left with the reality of the wounds on her face, which serve as very real and unforgettable markers of the mediation between her own body and the surgical instrument, i.e. the needle, the scalpel, the surgeon's knife. They form 'an inexhaustible encyclopedia of *pains* and discharges' (Ballard 39, emphasis mine). They are both part of a conceptual system of signs but also concrete

markers of pain which shatter the body's sense of unity. And, as Vivian Sobchack points out in her criticism of Baudrillard's reading of *Crash*, a criticism which can be applied with the same cogent force to Orlan's surgical practices, 'there's nothing like a little pain to bring us (back) to our senses, nothing like a real (not imagined) mark or wound or artificial orifice to counter Baudrillard's postmodern romanticism.'<sup>6</sup>

The body is as much a subject as it is an object; it is all too easy to forget our lived and imagined sense 'of the human body not merely as a material object among others, but as a material subject that bleeds and suffers and hurts for others because it can bleed and suffer and hurt for oneself' (Sobchack). While Sobchack's argument may read like a romanticized version of a nostalgic desire to recoup once more the body's subjectivity, which (one may argue) has *always already* been disseminated and fragmented *via* artifice and technological practices, it is significant that she brings the notion of the material body to the fore once more.

For Orlan cannot escape the body. The locus or site of action is precisely her body, on which she inscribes her own discursive text.<sup>7</sup> The photographic images are like a testament to the vulnerability of the flesh, in which the wounds map out a very precise representation of physical and psychical pain. It is paradoxical indeed that this should take place, especially considering Orlan's complete disavowal and rejection of this very pain on which her work is premised. Unlike many other female performance artists, who tend to magnify their pain and oppression under patriarchal discourse, she attempts to downplay it in her theatre of cruelty, even reduce it entirely.<sup>8</sup> As Elaine Scarry remarks, this type of logic is untenable precisely because physical pain, even when it is inscribed in an *elsewhere*, transferred onto another object (such as a photographic image, for example), will still retain or carry 'some of the attributes of pain with it' (173). Although Scarry is referring specifically to contexts involving war

and torture in her astute analysis, where one individual attempts to obliterate the sense of an other's pain, the fact remains that physical pain is real. As a phenomenon it occurs 'not several miles below our feet or many miles above our heads but within the bodies of the persons who inhabit the world through which we each day make our way.' Furthermore, it is 'a sign of pain's triumph' when it effects what Scarry calls an aversiveness by 'invok[ing] analogies to remote cosmologies (and there is a long tradition of such analogies)' (4).

What Orlan does is to invoke the sense that each surgical operation functions as a kind of remote cosmology divorced from material pain. She views her operations as attempts to achieve reincarnation in this life, with all the religious and mystic undertones that this implies. The image of the wound itself obviously resonates with religious undertones. Wounds exude a mysterious, mystic quality. Yet this mysticism is not specifically grounded in Christian doctrine. The wounds themselves have been begotten from the perverse union of the body with technology. As such, they are part of a new semio-gnosis, of which Orlan is the 'messiah'. Wounds are simply signs which circulate in this new semio-gnosis. There is no question of transcendence, that is, the wounds on the body are not transcendental signifiers; they are more like ambivalent signs in a constant play of signification, a neither/nor system.

The irony here is that Orlan's 'fantasy of rebirth,' her 'Christlike attempt to transcend the body and mortality' (Knafo 150) point to her very own sense of embodiment. After all, even Christ was half-man. When she notes that this visual fantasy 'of my body being opened endlessly' (150) resonates with religious imagery, I cannot help but be reminded of Caravaggio's painting *The Incredulity of St Thomas*. In it, Thomas is directly inserting his finger into Christ's wound, an open orifice out of which no blood is seen to flow (Plate 1.8). As Peggy Phelan notes of this painting,

its paradox is to be found precisely in the fact that Christ's bloodless body bears the very real marks of embodiment at the same time that it presents us with a disembodied subject:

The paradox of Caravaggio's painting lies precisely here: in the narrative "proof" of Christ's embodiment Caravaggio paints the radical disembodiment of human love and subjectivity. Recording the narrative "proof" of Christ as (eternally) living body, Caravaggio's painting gives us a wounded, bloodless body. An arrested frozen image, Caravaggio's Christ makes vivid the terror of embodiment (Phelan 42).

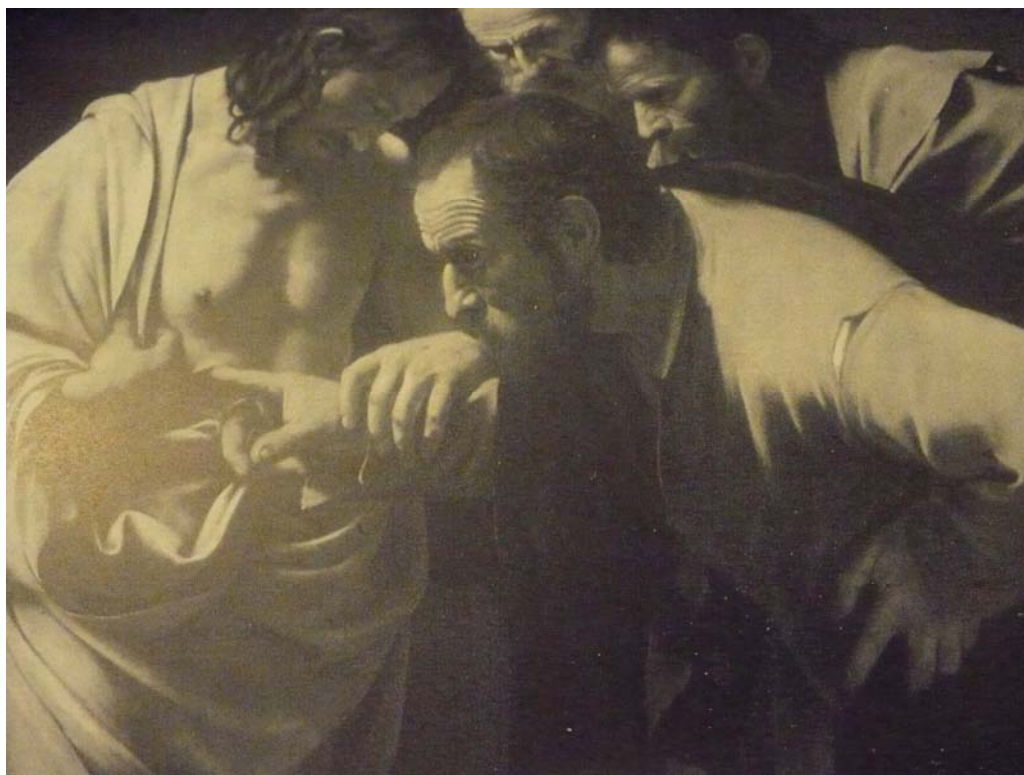


Plate 1.8 *The Incredulity of St. Thomas* – Caravaggio, c. 1601-2. Reproduced in Phelan (29).

This 'terror of embodiment' is the same terror I read in Orlan's fixed photographic images, which denounce their sense of embodiment at the very same time as they reinscribe it. The flat surface of the photograph does not erase its Barthesian *punctum*, its capacity not only to designate a body which was embodied at the time the photograph was taken, but also to imminently direct the spectator's

attention to their own painful embodiment as they look at Orlan's images. Some of her self-portraits, in fact, are composed using her own skin and blood, a visceral reminder once more of her message that the body is in pieces. As spectators we bear witness to Orlan's fragmented body. While it has been claimed that this fragmentation can be empowering to the extent that it textualizes and reterritorializes the female body – hence reclaiming it as a site of empowerment – I would argue that Orlan's project interrogates conceptions of embodied subjectivities in order to bring up specific concerns – feminist or otherwise – regarding spectatorship, the gaze and voyeurism rather than being a feminist manifesto of triumph. As Parveen Adams points out, there is an implicit horror in viewing Orlan's detachable face, 'the horror at seeing this, at not knowing where all this seeing will end' (58).

It is almost as if the real horror for the viewer lies in the possibility that Orlan's identity will cease to become recognizable or that she will even disappear. The lifting of her face confronts spectators with the prospect that identity is pliable, even erasable. The face becomes a mask or mere covering, yet a covering which we still cannot detach entirely in order to look underneath.

Since Orlan's face can be seen in close-up during her surgical operations it is significant that Adams should draw attention to it. As Georg Simmel points out, the face has an 'aesthetic significance' and achieves 'in mirroring the soul' through a kind of symmetrical unity and inner mimesis (qtd. in Seltzer 243). 'Hence any failure of the mimetic power of the face effects a violent "despiritualization," which takes the form of imagos of the shattered body.' Similarly, Deleuze and Guattari refer to an overcoded face-system 'that "draws the entire body" into the "abstract machine of faciality"' (Seltzer 243).

Although this frame of reference serves to unroot the face and body from concrete materiality and locate them in a mechanized abstraction, it serves to bring up the importance of the face as an overloaded system of signs which decode and even overcode the body. I would argue that it is this explicit overcoding which becomes traumatic when it exceeds its interpretative frame, leading to what Seltzer calls the failure of the mimetic power. Even though Barbara Rose claims that Orlan's use of mediated technology creates 'a sophisticated feedback system, a vicious circle of echoing and self-generating images' which spawn 'a progeny of hybrid media reproductions,' there is always the possibility that this system will break down with the weight of its sensory and imagistic overload. What is more, to see 'cuts in the face violates our sense of separation between the visceral and the human' (Lovelace 18).

Although Rose claims that Orlan creates a Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* or A-effect by alienating her audience through the 'sensory overload of her imagery' and its visceral effects, I would argue that there is a dimension to Orlan's work which elides the aesthetic because it cannot escape the corporeality of the body. Even if her goal is to alienate her spectators, it is arguable if she ever manages to achieve it – a point to which I shall return.<sup>9</sup>

Whatever the case may be, seeing the body literally and performatively in pieces is more traumatic than it is empowering. Sarah Wilson feelingly describes the pain involved whilst watching Orlan's surgical performances, noting that as 'spectators we witness her virtual martyrology, we know that her operations in flesh and spirit are both real and metonymic – an emblem for so much pain' (9). Wilson also claims that Orlan refuses giving her spectators a cathartic experience: 'We are witnesses at a tragedy which we are forced to experience empathetically (transsexually for the male viewer), as an aggression on ourselves. Catharsis – even as challenged in Artaud's

Theatre of Cruelty – is rigorously denied’ (16). Carey Lovelace, on the other hand, asserts that there is a ‘metaphysical healing potential’ in Orlan’s performances (25).

To begin with, there is what Lovelace calls an ‘inflammatory (in-your-face) quality’ to her work. Orlan wishes to evoke powerful emotions in her spectators: “I seek to make a visual work,” she said, “for which one has a strong bodily response, rather like one reacts physically listening to music” (Orlan, qtd. in Lovelace 18). Obviously Orlan’s claim here directly refutes Rose’s supposition of an alienating, Brechtian aestheticism.

At the same time, since catharsis is an embodied and social process in which the ‘shuddering body’ of the subject is marred by ‘rational vision’ and subject to ‘an unhealthy division of self and social being – a division which only catharsis itself can heal and regulate’ (Diamond 154), Orlan’s desire to make her performances social and embodied events leads, ironically, to what Diamond calls, *pace* Adorno, ‘the shudder of catharsis,’ which, as we have already seen, is not ultra-individualistic but socially contingent, dependent on the other for its embodiment. Since ‘catharsis marks and remarks a sentient convergence of body and meaning,’ Orlan’s material body becomes a social and visible embodiment involving herself and her spectators (154). This embodiment is achieved first through the assignation of ontological status and consistency – as well as hermeneutic visibility – to her body, and then through a marking and remarking of this body as a social body which sees its own performance at the same time as it is seen by others.

In other words, it is impossible to escape embodiment. In order to make the body socially visible – a social construction – some sense of its materiality needs to be recouped. This is important if we are to open out the body’s potentialities and avoid situating it in an either/or discursive or biologically determined model. As Vernon

Rosario astutely points out, discursive or constructivist analyses of the body may open ‘a broader terrain for understanding the body and sex as sociological and historical phenomena molded, perhaps even *determined*, by relations of power.’ However, although such analyses may offer a mode of resistance for women, they ‘might [also] instead foreclose the possibility of resistance because of the weight of socialization and cultural convention, or, in Butler’s formulation, the compulsory reiteration of gender and sexual norms’ (179).

Thus it would be dangerous to claim that Orlan is fashioning and refashioning her body at will and simply reconstructing her gender without returning to the material and sentient body, not so much in order to claim there is a biological or deterministic inevitability which Orlan cannot escape as to posit that any social (re)marking of the body must necessarily start at and with the body – a stumbling block which Orlan cannot magically do away with. Even psychoanalysis itself, which analyses the mind and psyche and attempts to stop at the body, cannot get rid of the body, which phenomenologically appears to haunt its theoretical borders in the same way as the maternal body returns to haunt Freud ‘like a *fata morgana*’ (Sprengnether 5).

There is a finitude to the body which makes it resistant to what Rose calls ‘hybrid’ reproductions. Through these operations Orlan herself becomes ‘vulnerable to disfigurement, even death’ (Lovelace 14). Even she realizes that her project will have to end sometime and that her body has limits. In a piece on corporal punishment in *The Independent* Judith Palmer quotes Orlan as saying: “I’d have to have an operation a month if I took up all the requests from galleries around the world” (par. 2). After she has created the ‘perfect’ mythological face out of ‘the images of the “Mona Lisa”, “Diana”, and Boticelli’s “Venus” her project will be complete, her face becoming an encrypted, overloaded and ‘living palimpsest where historical

representations of female beauty are stored' (Ashby 44). (Incidentally, her choice of body parts from different models is reminiscent of the artwork of the Greek painter Zeuxis who chose to paint the most beautiful features from five different women because he was unsatisfied with using only one female model.) In addition, the relics of her flesh and blood which she sells in vials to finance some of her final operations cannot be reproduced *ad infinitum* – unless she cuts herself to death – and attest to the body's corporeal limits. At the same time, these bodily relics are like excess by-products which she can expunge at will.

These bloody waste-products or 'bits of her dislodged flesh' (Lovelace 15) are like abject excretions which threaten her very identity. By refining Mary Douglas's notion of defilement in *Purity and Danger*, Kristeva advances her theory of abjection. The subject's very identity 'is tied to the identity of the borders of the body which are threatened by bodily secretions' such as blood, milk and urine. It is only by 'abjecting' or 'ejecting' these secretions that identity is constituted (Oliver 47). Thus her *oeuvre* is marked, ironically, by the abjection of herself as performer/artist/self in order to delineate more clearly the borders of her own identity and the dividing line 'between the inside and the outside, between the clean and proper self and the abject other' (47). Orlan becomes her own work of abjection. The only difference is that she herself orchestrates and regulates what is to be abjected at a specific moment in time, creating the comforting illusion of personal choice while the surgeons 'abjectify' her with their surgical implements. It is perhaps worthy to note in this context that Orlan has read aloud Kristeva's texts during her surgical performances.

The commodification of Orlan's flesh is reminiscent of the practices of the artist Piero Manzoni in the 1960s, who used his own blood, breath, and excrement in his artwork and then sold it in order to make a statement about the waste engendered in

the consumerist art world. This commodification may seem as a subversive and grotesque parody of capitalist and consumerist culture in which the female body becomes the object of male desire since Orlan is offering and marketing her body in irregular bits and pieces, as though it were some kind of a baroque figure which will bodily fall apart at any moment, rather than as a commodified whole to be screened over and appropriated by the male gaze. However, if a feminist reclaiming of the body entails its literal defragmentation, one wonders where the triumphalist outcome of Orlan's practices is to be located. At the same time, one also wonders how her alleged claims of negating rather than reclaiming the body can serve feminist ends.

If Orlan implodes any notion of a natural and living body, her experience is (re)created *ex nihilo*, leaving us to wonder wherein lies the truth of her experience since it is neither to be located in materialist nor spiritual frames of reference. For Orlan explicitly rejects Christian doctrine as well, although her work has strong ties to a Catholic visual tradition. She uses the passion of Christ as a tragedy and subverts it by positing herself as a martyr whose alleged sacrifice remains to a certain extent unredeemed. By attempting to make the flesh word rather than vice versa, Orlan subverts theological dogma at the same time as she denounces the religious belief in the body's sacred and inviolate wholeness.

It is interesting that Orlan should do this by making use of artistic representations of Greco-Roman mythological figures such as Diana, who was equated with the virgin goddess of the hunt Artemis, and Venus, the goddess of love and beauty. These female figures are seen as idealized stereotypes of feminine beauty in Western culture and statuesque representations of them aim at maintaining a sense of the body's sculpted wholeness. In opposition to Orlan's project, which tests the body's

boundaries and its porosity, these figures attest to the body's hermetic self-containment. Orlan plays with this idea and posits it as a perilous fantasy.

As Maren Möhring points out, Greek sculpture focuses on bodily contours and 'aims at a body sealed off from the environment, self-contained and self-possessed' (238). At the same time, Greek statues represent the female nude as chaste and immaculate, an idea which Orlan toys with in a dangerous way since by sculpting her own naked and sexualized body in public she risks entering into the zone of pornography rather than the aesthetic realm. Her performative work can be aligned with many of Carolee Schneemann's confrontational performances in the 1960s, such as *Eye/Body* (1963), which aimed to subvert the traditional relationship between the pleasure-seeking gaze of the male viewer and the submissive masochism of the female subject who passively offers her body for spectatorial consumption. In her efforts to reclaim and control her body, Schneeman was often accused at the time of narcissistically exposing it and this compromised and often stunted the radical and political efficacy of her project.

In terms of its mode of reception, inasmuch as it feeds into feminist concerns with the gaze and voyeuristic practices, responses have been divided and there has often been a tendency to downplay and even elide the aesthetic dimension of Orlan's work in order to accentuate the traumatic implications of viewing, and in Orlan's case physically experiencing, the real event of a body as it is surgically cut and maimed. At the same time, the voyeuristic aspect of Orlan's performances draws on modes of theatre like freak shows and the Grand Guignol [*sic*], a genre focusing on horror shows and whose eponymous theatre originated in Paris, with brief flourishing bouts in London as well over the years. It was noted for 'its gruesome depictions of gore, madness and perversion' and for its focus on ocularcentrism and sadomasochistic

practices. 'Eyes were gouged out, stabbed and swallowed, while blind characters played a prominent role in the performances' (Freshwater 254).

Not only did the playwrights of this genre focus on the eye's vulnerability as a bodily organ but also on its susceptibility to deception and illusion by skilfully presenting events which never really took place. At the same time, and apart from the use of such sleights of hand, they also 'exploited contemporary anxieties about contagious and inherited diseases, foreigners and the impact of technological and medical advances' (254). Not only does Orlan tap into such anxieties others may possess but she also explicitly celebrates these advances in technological progress as a welcome stepping-stone towards her road to self-transformation.

It is extremely telling that all of Orlan's performances are mediated by technological devices such as the camera. The eye of the camera is like a wandering and roving eye which probes underneath Orlan's skin to reveal its interiority, an interiority of flesh and blood that is 'objectified, thingified, imaged' (Cadava 90). In his analysis of Benjamin's *Illuminations* and the subject of photography, Eduardo Cadava stresses the moribund link between photography and death. The photograph is really its own 'grave for the living dead' because it inherently bespeaks of 'a history of ghosts and shadows – and it does so because it *is* this history.' The photographic image itself is a monument or testament to the living corpse, 'the living image of a dead thing' (Barthes qtd. in Cadava 90).

Not surprisingly, a primary signifier of the abject for Kristeva is the actual corpse which invokes horror as it blurs the boundaries between self and other. Ironically, Orlan's photographic images during her live performances are constant reminders or relics that bear witness to the very real possibility of her death rather than transformation as she is 'captured' by the camera. Her constant attempts to expose her interiority through the use of technological devices are bound to fail at the outset. For as Derrida

reminds us in *The Gift of Death*: ‘No manifestation can consist in rendering the interior exterior or show what is hidden’ (63).

In a sense, although Orlan attempts to imitate Greco-Roman art, which could be seen perhaps ‘as a mimetic form of self-formation,’ her radical reformulation of the body by reconfiguring its porosity is obviously closer to more modern machinic models of the body than anything else (Möhring 238). The modern body is vulnerable, exposed and permeable. At the same time, it is connected to technological devices, becoming a ‘prosthesis’ of the machine. The body becomes, or rather it *is* a machine, or in Artaud’s terms ‘an over-heated factory’ (qtd. in Seltzer 242).

Orlan exhibits a constant and obsessive fascination with removing the skin or outer covering of the body in order to look inside and thus make the outside mirror, or rather *become*, the inside. She claims that the lack of pain in her performances is central to her work because the trauma of witnessing a human body torn and ripped apart shifts self-reflection onto the viewer. In an interview with Robert Einright in 1998 for the magazine *Border Crossings*, she emphasizes the transgressive power of this inner/outer divide and of pain generally:

So, this last operation is on the theme of pain, and actually the absence of pain. I intend to have myself cut completely open and to show the inside of my body. I would be lying smiling, absolutely conscious and just showing the inside of my body without any pain. And when you open up like that to the world, you are creating a wound which has also sexual and erotic connotations. This would be another stage, the stage of self-mirroring and the mirror brought up to the world. Then, after everybody will have looked into my body, I will simply have it closed back (45).

Orlan’s performances are like ‘an elaborate skin show’ where the skin ‘no longer conceals or contains, it offers itself up as text, as body, as monster’ (Halberstam 7). Although Halberstam is referring explicitly to the Gothic tradition, where the skin becomes the ultimate, divisive boundary, there is certainly a grotesque element or dimension to Orlan’s work which makes many of her viewers recoil in horror in the same way as they would when watching splatter or skin being torn asunder and

relentlessly flayed in horror movies. There is, in Orlan's work, what Baudrillard has defined in 'The Ecstasy of Communication' as the obscenity of 'transparence and immediate visibility, when everything is exposed to the harsh and inexorable light of information and communication' (130).

As Lovelace has pointed out, when artists and critics congregated in Soho in the Sandra Gering Gallery in 1993 to watch Orlan's seventh operation from her project *The Reincarnation of Saint Orlan* on a large TV screen, the actual gallery 'emptie[d] of a third of its audience' before the performance had drawn to an end (13). Davis cites one of Orlan's lectures given in Amsterdam in 1995, where she projected images on screen of herself during 'reconstructive' cosmetic surgeries. 'The audience watched as the surgeon inserted needles into her face, sliced open her lips, and, most gruesomely of all, severed her ear from the rest of her face with his scalpel' (Davis 454). As Davis remarks, the complete indifference with which Orlan presented these images of her own body art naturally produced a shock in the audience. It takes a 'strong' stomach, after all, to watch these various gruesome acts of bodily mutilation.<sup>10</sup> Yet this is, on the whole, Orlan's intention to begin with: the audience *must* be shocked if her art is to be at all effective. For 'art has to be transgressive, disruptive and unpleasant in order to have a social function' (Davis 458).

However, what exactly is the 'social function' of Orlan's body art, and how effective is this art in the materialization of that very social function which it claims to perform? In order to answer these questions, one must return to the body once more and the way it is perceived. For Orlan, modern technological advances in cosmetic surgery, eugenics and virtual reality have now shattered any notion of a natural body as being nothing more than a precarious fantasy. However, as many critics have claimed, Orlan makes her body the site of action and through surgery

transforms it 'into language' (Salecl 169). This is similar to Karen Sanchez-Eppler's formulation in 'Bodily Bonds' that women can find their voice only after they refashion their flesh and reclaim it from patriarchal discourse.

From a feminist perspective, the parallelism with Orlan's body art is not wide of the mark since her art has often been seen as an attempt at reclamation – the reclamation, that is, of the female body. It is an art which not only 'examines the social pressures which are exercised upon women through their bodies,' but also attempts to subvert, or at least relieve, those pressures (Davis 458). One way in which Orlan does this is by subversively inverting the patriarchal reading of the 'feminine ideal.' As Davis points out, her face 'deviates radically from the masculinist ideal of feminine perfection' (458) and Germaine Greer highlights that she is 'a feminist ikon' (33).

Yet how successful is Orlan's body art? And how does Orlan reclaim the female body by negating its ontological materiality? Finally, is it really possible to destroy the concept of a natural body? Although Orlan would answer the latter question in the affirmative, I am highly sceptical of her complete disavowal of physical, if not psychological, pain involved in her extreme surgical practices. The body is full of nerve endings that are receptive to pain, many of them located on the skin. To claim, therefore, to be a disembodied subject, incapable of feeling pain and playfully reciting literary texts in front of a camera 'while her face is being jabbed with needles or cut' is clearly not feasible (Davis 457).

In addition, it is not a very pleasant sight either for most people to witness Orlan's lecture, as evidenced by the audience's responses in Amsterdam. It is not an easy task to surpass the sheer 'gruesomeness' of Orlan's body art and critically engage with the issues it raises about the female body, identity and personal agency. Like other self-

mutilative practices which are commonly viewed as perverse, Orlan's body art can very easily be seen as an insane practice of a twisted mind. As Judith Halberstam points out in *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*, it is easy to read the body that changes as being a sign of monstrosity. Many try to turn away from it because in it and through it 'we may read the difference between an other and a self, a pervert and a normal person, a foreigner and a native' (8).

Armando Favazza grapples with similar issues in his highly comprehensive *Bodies Under Siege: Self-mutilation and Body Modification in Culture and Psychiatry*, which explores the ambivalence or even dread felt by individuals when they are faced with self-mutilators – who are in many cases female – and their practices, which often seem inane and senseless. He attempts to arrive at a more critical understanding of the complex and multifaceted dimensions of self-mutilation as a practice, both on an intrapersonal and societal level.

As Favazza notes, 'we normally live within our skins. All that is enclosed by my skin is me; everything else is not me. The skin is a border between the outer world and the inner world, the environment and the personal self.' A tendency for self-mutilative practices may occur once this border or boundary between inner and outer worlds starts to break down, the subject no longer being able 'to perceive where the body ends and the outside world begins.' This condition, pathological in nature, is commonly termed 'depersonalisation disorder' since it is marked by the subject's own loss of any sense of personhood, a feeling that the body is unreal and 'that time and the environment have mysteriously changed' (Favazza 148; 274).

As it is the body that forms the locus or centre onto which self-mutilative practices are enacted and inscribed an exploration into the various perceptions that self-mutilators have of their own bodies can be highly enlightening in our understanding

of mutilation practices. One form of mutilation, that of self-cutting, is an often highly effective attempt on the part of the subject to reinstate himself or herself back into subjective personhood. Once the cut stimulates pain and the letting of blood, cutters 'are able to verify that they are alive,' that they have a skin border and that their body has limits (Favazza 148).

'Feeling alive' and rejuvenated after the cutting is a sensation which most, if not all, cutters tend to experience. John Kafka documents the story of a young woman who had the intense and "exquisite border experience of sharply becoming alive" at the moment of cutting herself. She described the flow of blood as being like a voluptuous bath whose pleasant warmth spread over her body, *moulding* its contour and *sculpting* its form' (qtd. in Favazza 161, emphasis mine). In stark contrast to suicidal attempts, however, such ritualized bloodletting is seen as regenerative, not 'an exit into death' but 'a re-entrance into [life and] into a state of normality' (Favazza 271). It makes the body feel real and tangible.

This blood-bath ritual is extremely telling. As the blood flows down the body, the body's borders or 'contours' so to speak are clearly defined and delimited. This mysterious gratification which this process entails can be linked with more than just specific masochistic tendencies on the part of the subject: the warm embrace of blood in this instance is sexually, even fetishistically, gratifying.

This linkage between sexual gratification and cutting has also been reported as existing in many other cases, in which skin cutting is seen as 'represent[ing] the creation of multiple little female genitalia on the skin,' which the subject can then fondle at will and touch unrestrainedly (Favazza 163). The stimulation of pain here induces a pleasurable sensation which almost seems to match that attained during masturbatory activity, the letting of blood metaphorically parallel to what occurs

during orgasm: a rush of blood to the vagina and clitoris occurs at this critical moment. Viewed from a different standpoint also, the ‘little female genitalia’ or cuts, as they bleed, can also be seen as self-induced and orchestrated outlets for menses,<sup>11</sup> but a menses that is ‘vicarious,’ predictable and regulated (165).

As a result, such bloodletting, for cutters, takes on therapeutic properties, which is fairly reminiscent of bloodletting therapy in eighteenth-century England as practised by prominent surgeons such as Joseph Lister. This allowed ‘unclean’ blood to be discharged, thus ‘provid[ing] an opening through which the tension and badness in [patients’] bodies [could] rapidly escape’ (Favazza 272). This provides instant relief, a feeling of euphoria, and allows the cutter to release, in private, feelings of rage and frustration directed against the self or the outside world, in the guise of its various medical, political and socio-cultural institutions. Although perhaps not as effective as practices enacted on a broad social scale, such as public demonstrations or picketing, the very act of self-cutting ‘is some sort of action’ which is both therapeutic and ‘preferable’ to complete passive resistance (273).

On another level, self-mutilation of this kind can be therapeutic precisely because of the scar which it leaves, or inscribes, on the body. The relief of watching one’s own blood flow gives way to the relief of watching oneself heal, the scar symbolically evidencing the body’s healing capacity, and also ‘mark[ing] a hurtful occasion’ or event (Favazza 280). The cut or wound possesses regenerative power.

Similarly, in other more permanent forms of body modification, such as piercing, the ‘mark’ of the cut also becomes ‘a very strengthening and powerful experience.’ After the cut you ‘bleed and then end up with something beautiful... and then it heals and you have it and you’re proud of it – that can be very empowering. It can be a reclaiming for a lot of people’ (V. Vale & A. Juno qtd. in Favazza 284).

This experiential sense of ‘reclaiming’ one’s own body by modifying it according to one’s own specification and then watching it heal is often envisioned as a truly liberating event. In a case study quoted by Germaine Greer, stripper Jane Shag Stamp remarks of her piercing and tattooing practices, “I get off on the initial pain... And I come home high and treat myself to taking it easy... Some folk seem to think by stripping I’m offering up my body to all these men, well I like to think tattooing/piercing helps me to *feel* like it is my own” (99, italics mine).

While this is quite clearly an assertion of the ‘liberatory’ function of such practices as body piercing, it is also an equivocal response since it not only allows us to wonder whether it would be a truly liberatory event if it were not a response to the actual ‘trauma’ of stripping, but also because it illustrates the inherent dichotomy between actual reality and lived, perceptual experience, *feeling* and *having*. For it is, after all, very different to ‘feel’ that the body is one’s own than it is for it to ‘be’ one’s own and thus be able to *reclaim* complete autonomous control over it. What Shag Stamp has overlooked, although it comes out implicitly in her discourse, is the diminishing of her personal agency in the process itself. It is probably the professional body piercer or tattooer who had the control whilst refashioning and modifying her body, in the same way as it is the surgeon who is holding the surgical appliances during Orlan’s performances. Thus it is all very well to assert that through cosmetic surgery, the literal ‘cut’ inscribed onto her body, she can reclaim control and that under the cut of the surgeon’s knife, she ‘designs her body, orchestrates the operations and makes the final decision about when to stop and when to go on’ (Davis 459). Indeed, it is all very well as long as we forget that a single cut by the surgeon in the wrong place can cause permanent disfigurement if not death.

Obviously we do not live in an enclosed vacuum. Orlan's performative acts cannot be seen exclusively in ultra-individualistic terms. They necessarily draw the other into the visual and discursive domain. Hence, although 'the surgeons themselves remain subject to the final gaze of Orlan's camera' and hence 'cannot escape her watchful eye' (Ashby 45), it is also inevitably the case that they are scripting her body and subjecting it to their own reified gaze. At the same time as her performances are mediated by the technology of the gaze, they also bear witness to the other within the visual and perceptual field.

As spectators, we too are appropriating her body within our scopic field. Of course we can make a conscious choice to avert our gaze and fix or concentrate it elsewhere, especially when visibility becomes excessive or, in Baudrillard's terms, too obscene. For Orlan repeatedly strikes our eyes with images which 'plunge in and strike directly where it hurts' (Knafo 145). Danielle Knafo compares her to Medusa:

Like Medusa, Orlan is both fascinating and dreadful. We wish to gaze at her as she engages in body mutating and life-threatening practices, yet we are aghast at the slicing of her flesh, frozen by the literal confrontation with bloody castration, mortality, and the *uncanny* encounter between reality and fantasy (144, emphasis mine).

Body rituals are uncannily repetitive even as they tend to blur the boundaries 'between reality and fiction.' As Freud points out in *The 'Uncanny'* (1919), the uncanny is really 'nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind' (363-4). Clearly bodily sacrifice is not a modern concept. Even though Orlan attempts to induce shock therapy with her own radical body modification practices, she was not the first to engage in offensive sexual acts or blood sacrifices. Amongst Orlan's predecessors were Gina Pane, who 'was known for the tiny cuts she made in her body in events that had ritualistic, religious overtones,' Rudolph Schvartzkogler who focused on the body in his violent and ritualistic

practices by maiming himself, as well as Chris Burden whose art work ‘included crawling over broken glass, sticking electrical wires in his chest, and having himself crucified on a Volkswagon’ (Lovelace 15).

What is more, although Knafo associates Orlan to the all-powerful Medusa, she forgets about the spectators who stand in for Perseus and can detach themselves from her transfixed and petrified stare simply by averting it or even ‘cutting’ Orlan off from their visual terrain. Although Orlan claims that she wishes for her spectators to close their eyes, refusing to look could also effectively be construed as a way of disengaging from the social and critical function Orlan claims to perform in her work. If the personal *in extremis* is to become political, then at the very least Orlan’s surgical practices should be viewed as a social and embodied involvement – at least, that is, if her project is to succeed.

In other words, the audience *must* be made to look if her work is to have any potent political force or social currency. Influenced by Artaud and his Theatre of Cruelty, Orlan’s work follows on from a large tradition of body artists in the 1960s who sought to merge audience and performance and effect social and political change. Artaud ‘propose[d] a theatre where violent physical images pulverise, mesmerise the audience’s sensibilities, caught in the drama as if in a vortex of higher forces’ (*The Theatre and Its Double* 63). In short, ‘every facet of the spectator’s sensibility’ was to be attacked by recourse to ‘a revolving show’ that would ‘extend its visual and oral outbursts over the whole mass of spectators’ (66). Sacrifice, the Dionysian festival and bodily mutilation were all ways of achieving these outbursts.

Orlan was also influenced by Bataille’s work on eroticism and the sacred, which removes any sense of the erotic and evokes the horror of death. As he notes in *Theory of Religion*: ‘Man feels a kind of impotent horror in the sense of the sacred’ (36).

According to Bataille, taboos imposed by culture and religion shelter us from this horror – taboos which Orlan herself transgresses. In a sense, there is a very real horror in witnessing Orlan’s transgression of the sacred through her artwork.

She disrupts social and monolithic constructions of sexuality, identity and religion. In many of her pieces she mocks Renaissance art which depicted the Virgin and other holy women and attempts to subvert the Catholic division of femininity into the stereotypes of angelic saint or whore. Whereas the ‘White Virgin’ is holy and chaste, Orlan praises the ‘Black Virgin’ who, like Adam’s first wife Lilith in the Old Testament, is autonomous and in Jewish folklore more generally represents the female demon-goddess. In *Black Virgin Wielding White Cross and Black Cross No. 24* (1983), Orlan plays with the opposition between white and black. Dressed in a black leatherette gown she wields two crosses in her hands, an upturned white one and a black one which faces downwards in order to symbolize its inversion of deeply ingrained Christian tradition. At the same time, she exposes one of her breasts, which is reminiscent of the way in which many artists and painters used to represent the Madonna, with her nurturant breast, as she suckled the baby Jesus. The breast attacks spectators’ sensibility as well as their visual field. With its Medusa-like quality, it is the quintessential example of the castrating breast which petrifies action.

At the same time, there is an almost defiant rejection of anything maternal since the breast here is not seen as a symbol of nourishment. In her corporeal performance, Orlan dismisses the sanctity of the breast, or rather, the sanctity with which it is steeped in religious tradition. It is glaringly surrounded by black latex rather than the virgin-like tresses of the Madonna’s robe. As a signifier of the abject, this breast becomes a visibly erotic one, charged with sensual energy. At the same time, it is a

performing breast as well, 'rendered obscene' by 'its appearance outside the usual domestic frame' (Giles 136).



Plate 1.9 *Black Virgin Wielding White Cross and Black Cross No. 24*, 1983, Cibachrome on aluminum, 160 x 120 cm. Photograph by Jean-Paul Lefret. Published in *Orlan 1964-2001*, 59.

It is not difficult to see that such works as *Black Virgin Wielding White Cross and Black Cross No. 24* have the potential to shock many of its viewers. Some of this shock derives from Orlan's subversion of religious dogma and iconography. It is also induced by her capacity to physically enter her work and confront her viewers directly with the provocative gaze of the Black Virgin. In the same way as she does with her surgical and self-mutilative performances, Orlan uses some of her other pieces as a way of identifying herself with holy figures. Due to their transgressive nature, her aesthetic performances can very easily slip into being labelled as deranged and delusional practices of a psychotic or mentally imbalanced individual.

As Favazza notes, this is often the case with self-mutilation and other practices which we have difficulty in understanding. And, as we have already seen, self-mutilation does bear religious or mystic undertones, with many self-mutilators identifying themselves with or even as a Christ-like figure. Indeed, what is concerning is not so much the resonance of self-mutilation to religious doctrine, but the uncanny blurring of the boundaries between life and death, pleasure and unpleasure, which this practice seems to entail and which Freud highlights so aptly in his seminal essay 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (1920).

The boundaries are very thin. Without clearly demarcating the boundaries between mutilation as grace or perversion, a source of pleasure or unpleasure, Favazza suggests that 'it is easy to forget that dripping blood may accompany birth as well as death' (322). The fact that people still gather round to watch Orlan is certainly evidence of what Mark Seltzer defines in *Serial Killers* as our 'wound culture: the public fascination with torn and open bodies and torn and opened persons, a collective gathering around shock, trauma, and the wound' (1). We are as fascinated as we are repelled by it all. We may be able to turn away in due time, but the cut has already been made.

## Chapter Six

### Blood Play and Second Skins: Viewing the Cut in the Body and 'Splatter' in Franko B's Dramatic Performances

In Franko B's performance *I'm Not Your Babe* (1996), performed at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London, the Italian artist Franko B has his body painted white like an achromatic ghost or cadaver. Standing stark naked before his audience like a mute canvas or body-object, he strikes a beatific posture and kneels as a catheter in his arm drains his blood to the canvas floor. Some of his own blood, drained prior to the performance, is also poured onto him. More cuts are made onto his body by invisible hands off-stage 'as (the) blood wells from the "stigmata" of his wounded forearm' and drips down onto his body canvas and the stage. He then lies down in a pool of his own blood. Finally, 'he is bound and suspended upside-down' in the posture of an inverted crucifixion as the audience watches him in stunned silence (Campbell and Spackman 59).

Not surprisingly, the performances are taxing on Franko B and thus carefully regulated, with only three to four performances taking place every year. Before his performances roughly three pints of blood are removed from his body at four to six week intervals in order to be used in his performances. The temporal interludes also give his body the necessary time to regenerate more blood. As Simon Grant points out in a feature article for *The Independent* the whole process of the performance is in itself 'staggering' and Franko B ends it in a state of 'near collapse from loss of blood' (par. 1). Franko B says of his performances that they are not intended to provoke sympathy for him or induce shock therapy: "It's not my intention to freak people out.

I just want to create beautiful images and *survive* them, like life – make the bearable unbearable [*sic*]” (par. 3, italics mine).<sup>1</sup>

In other words, the whole performance is geared towards the end result – the ultimate survival from the vicissitudes of art and life. The performance itself becomes a process of personal therapy, an event which is lived through to the very end and whose bloody outcome ensures that Franko B will emerge out of it rejuvenated and alive, as having persisted to the very end of his own self-martyrdom. According to his own evaluation of his work, the cutting and opening out of his body in order to push the limits of his own corporeality and self-endurance is an act of survival, an ecstatic moment of *jouissance* which ‘goes beyond sexual pleasure, beyond pleasure itself’ and almost tips over into ‘psychic dissolution’ (Benstock 16). As he notes of his own work:

For me, the value, the point of the performance is surviving it. Once it’s over, it’s freedom – I’ve done what I set out to do, I achieved it – surviving the pressure – my mind, my body – it’s not a macho thing – it’s like, it makes me stronger. It’s very quick, it’s quite amazing, you come back to the place you were before, but now there’s a purity in the fact – I get up and I walk off, so what – I get up and walk off (1995, qtd. in Campbell and Spackman 64-5).

As Nietzsche’s famous quotation goes, what does not kill you makes you stronger. Yet the seeming nonchalance with which Franko B dismisses the pain involved in his performances in order to get to the end result is certainly suggestive, perhaps even disturbing. In a pre-emptive move which is reminiscent of Orlan’s, Franko B casually dismisses the pain – both psychic and physical – involved in attaining this state of ‘purity’ he attests to. The declarative repetition of ‘I get up and I walk off’ – together with the coupling of ‘so what’ – is a blatant refusal, a downright denial of the pain involved in his own bloodletting. Like a snake which has just shed its own skin, Franko B emerges seemingly ‘unscathed’ from his performances and just gets up and walks away.

In effect, Franko B's performance works on two levels; it is an act of cleansing or purification which points towards an accession to transcendence at the same time as it paradoxically shatters the possibility of its attainment. As Amelia Jones notes in "Corporeal Malediction": Franko B's Body/Art and the Trace of Whiteness' (2006), Franko B's body becomes 'an over-exaggerated signifier of a purity gone awry' (par. 3). His performances showcase the white male body and promise a kind of ritualized transcendence from 'brute corporeality' at the same time as they consign this body to the 'continual never-ending failure to transcend' (par. 4).

Every attempt at transcendence strips the flesh of its identity. As Rachel Armstrong points out, 'his flesh is stripped of all means of identity. By creating an impersonal body, Franko creates a painful vision of what the body is, rather than what it is dressed up to be' (qtd. in Marney 90). In practice, this notion of creating an impersonal or 'abstract' body is painful to watch – even frightening. Yet while it has been claimed that the horror derives from the fact that Franko B enacts and re-enacts the ominous threat of the uncontainable body only to surpass it, I would like to suggest that it is his ambivalent life-in-death status and his failure to escape his own body's limitations which pose a greater threat to audience sensibility.

While some critics have claimed, in fairly clear-cut terms, that Franko B refuses to offer the audience a kind of cathartic release, the ease with which he ends his performances and his putative attainment of a state of purified 'grace' make the question of catharsis a rather moot point. Rather, it is his brief flirtations with death before he 'gets up and walks away' which are unsettling. He ambivalently wavers between life and death like a living corpse, a life-in-death zombie which serves to remind the audience of his inevitable mortality, and theirs too. As a visual artist, Franko B makes the audience confront the possibility of death on stage. And, as was

mentioned previously, it was theatre, for Herbert Blau, which ‘stinks most of mortality.’

It is precisely this ambivalent wavering between life and death which induces spectatorial horror. As Franko B lies inert like a corpse on the canvas stage in a pool of his own blood, he becomes the perfect signifier of the abject. For Kristeva the abject refers to ‘that which revolts me, which makes me flee into my own skin, which sets my boundaries’ (Piper 104). Paradoxically, the subject attempts to expel the abject from outside only to realize that it lies hidden within:

If it be true that the abject simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject, one can understand that it is experienced [...] when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very being, that it is none other than abject (Kristeva qtd. in Piper 104).

Thus the audience attempts to identify with Franko B’s corpse by expelling it only to realize that the abject lies inextricably within. Recognition of the self as corpse may provoke anxiety or even induce horror. At the same time, however, Franko B’s survival in the face of death can be a positively liberating experience for him and for his audience. In her analysis of Marguerite Duras’s work, Karen Piper uses Kristeva’s notion of abjection in order to liberate the signifying possibilities of the corpse. Within certain realms such as ‘love or anarchy, the corpse is a figure of liberty, of satiated sexuality, of the ‘waiting period’ after the scream, in the space of the unspeakable dismemberment of society’ (111).

There is something frightening about Franko B’s silent endurance towards pain. At the same time, his work attests to the violence inherent in society and operates within ‘the space of [its] unspeakable dismemberment.’ It is extremely significant that Franko B says of his work that it is profoundly about relationships. In this sense, his bloodletting is not simply a narcissistic ritual. Franko B gives himself up to the

audience ‘and invites us to experience the work as not only autobiographical in terms of the artist, but relational – soliciting a personal, emotional, and narcissistic investment from the spectator’ (Doyle).<sup>2</sup>

Such emotional investment is often hard to achieve when the audience is already desensitized to the horror of violent events. Franko B’s silent and bleeding body may be soliciting some kind of personal response from its spectators, but the violent spectacle of his inflicted injuries and the bloody gore and ‘splatter’ it unleashes, creating a parallel as it does with freak shows and the genre of the horror film (where bodies splatter all the time), could actually lead to an anaesthetized stance, ‘the corpse-like anarchy of doing [and feeling] nothing’ (Piper 108). As Jennifer Doyle illustrates, this sense of anaesthetization is problematized by artists in their work: ‘Artists who make the management of feeling and the daily alienation of people from their emotional selves the subject of their work often draw to the surface the difficulty of having feelings at all.’

According to Doyle, there is a ‘risk’ involved in feeling, or feeling *too* much, because ‘we have been so deeply trained [by society] to expect to feel nothing.’ We live in a fast-paced capitalist and consumerist world ‘criss-crossed by globalised networks of communication and identification, informational circuits traveling at warp speed’ (Jones, par. 3). We are constantly bombarded on all sides by the media with often violent images of human suffering. Thus, although the visibility of Franko B’s suffering body can elicit an emotional investment from its spectators, more often than not it causes emotional alienation. In ‘The Ecstasy of Communication’ Baudrillard takes this a step further by obliterating the distance between the spectacle itself and the subject through communicative and informational networks. There is no longer any sense of ‘the dramatic interiority of the subject’ because we no longer live

as actors 'but as a terminal of multiple networks' (128). Thus for Baudrillard alienation has become a thing of the past in the simulated and hyperreal world we now live in:

We are no longer a part of the drama of alienation; we live in the ecstasy of communication. And this ecstasy is obscene. The obscene is what does away with every mirror, every look, every image. The obscene puts an end to every representation. But it is not only the sexual that becomes obscene in pornography; today there is a whole pornography of information and communication, that is to say, of circuits and networks, a pornography of all functions and objects in their readability, their fluidity, their availability, their regulation, in their forced signification, in their performativity, in their branching, in their polyvalence, in their free expression...

It is no longer then the traditional obscenity of what is hidden, repressed, forbidden or obscure; on the contrary, it is the obscenity of the visible, of the all-too-visible, of the more-visible-than-the-visible [...] (130-1).

All this visibility is subsumed under these networks of communication and information. There is no more room for affectivity or even for private decisions and deliberations, 'only for reception and push-button control' (Piper 108). And, what is more, these systems of visibility endlessly reproduce themselves as they are absorbed by the subject. This would explain, perhaps, why such visible performances such as those of Franko B can even have the opposite effect of their original intention. Instead of sensitizing its audience to 'the [violent and] unspeakable dismemberment of society,' Franko B's performance could have its audience sadistically clamouring for more gore and blood. Judith Palmer notes how 'Franko B found the crowd literally buying for his blood after a performance' given in 1995. Apparently the performance had not been 'outrageous' or violent enough, even though 'Franko's performance had left him so bruised he couldn't walk for a week' (par. 3).

Such spectatorial responses attest to the sadistic pleasure, even thrill, many people obtain in watching others suffer. Filmmakers of horror and 'splatter' films are aware of this and bank on it in order to ensure that their films achieve commercial success, using various techniques to manipulate and generate the desired responses in their audiences. As Halberstam aptly notes, 'monsters' achieve immortality due to avid

consumerist demand for them: ‘The undead, the monsters who threaten to live forever, find eternal life in the circularity of consumption and production that characterizes Hollywood’ (177). One example of this circularity is the manifestation of endless sequel upon sequel documenting tales of horror, serial killings and splattered gore and carnage.

Franko B’s performances feed into this circuitous system, sustained as it is by sadomasochistic tendencies and drawing on scopophilic/fetishistic drives.<sup>3</sup> Society often displaces these tendencies onto other systems which are judged to be neither heterosexist nor heteronormative. As Campbell and Spackman make clear:

So much in our society, Franko B. reflects, *is* violent, but our quotidian exposure to mediatized images of war, famine, and cruelty both desensitizes our responses and implicates us in a sadomasochism that society conveniently displaces behind the closed doors of the gay underworld (60).

In other words, Franko B is aware of the fact that he is implicated, as is his audience, in a social system which attempts to maintain its exclusive ideological constructions of gender and sexuality by displacing any discursive systems which resist them into an abject and sadomasochistic underbelly. By using his body as the site of the abject, as a body that attempts to radically perform its own presence, Franko B ‘can allegorise the ultimate impossibility of maintaining these typically exclusive and heteronormative systems as such’ (Harradine 69). His body confronts us with the frailty, or rather the instability, of our heteronormative systems which proscribe certain normative sexualities and illegitimize others.

As David Harradine reminds us, however, in *Abject Identities and Fluid Performances: Theorizing the Leaking Body*, this reductionistic process can only be supported and maintained by reference to its ‘aberrant’ obverse: ‘This process of reduction necessarily institutes a structure in which such nominally “normal” sexualities can only be conceptualised through correlative notions of those designated

“perverted” or “aberrant”, against which this putative “normality” is defined’ (71).

Franko B uses his work to show that sadomasochism and gay culture are the obverse side of the social coin, deeply ingrained as they are in our visual culture and everyday lives as much as we try to dispel them:

...for me it’s normal. And when people go on about S/M, I think S/M is an inevitable thing in society, it’s a general thing in society, it’s the way we grow up, it doesn’t matter if you’re a Muslim, a Roman Catholic, whatever – there’s this strong S/M element in life. When people go on about S/M and gay culture – I think, but it’s the way people behave everyday. For example, what I call S/M is someone sitting in their living room, making a cup of tea, switching the telly on and getting very excited by images of people dying and starving in Ethiopia. To me getting off on those images is S/M. You pay to be entertained, you send money – bang, bang, bang: you’re paying to take away your fucking sorrow, your miserable life, your loneliness at the end of the day. So you focus on somebody else’s misery (‘Surviving the Performance: An Interview with Franko B.,’ Campbell and Spackman 67).

The triple ‘bang’ at the end of Franko B’s formulation is the pivotal point where he forcefully drives home that even a simple gesture as watching visual images of suffering on TV and ‘getting off on those images’ is a form of side-tracking which serves to displace our own suffering by focusing on that of others. According to Franko B, we are all implicated in a regulative system which attempts to consolidate its hegemonic power by disavowing, or rather by displacing, the pervasiveness of S/M and gay culture onto other identifications. As Judith Butler powerfully suggests in *Bodies that Matter*, it is precisely this heterosexist imperative, constructed as it is by social norms, which ‘enables certain sexed identifications and forecloses and/or disavows other identifications’ (3). *Via* the operations of an ‘exclusionary matrix’ through which subjects assume their sexed identities, another domain is simultaneously produced, ‘a domain of abject beings’ who are not yet ‘subjects’ in a representative sense ‘but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject.’ Thus the abject is seen as ‘designat[ing] here precisely those “unlivable” and “uninhabitable” zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject’ (3).

Yet what characterizes these sexed subject positions is their apparent fluidity and motility ‘against the rigid continuity and fixity of humanist constructions.’ As David Harradine forcefully suggests, any performed embodiment of abjection ‘begins to productively guarantee the revelation of the constitutive instability and inevitable collapse of these systems of division and difference; of oppressive and restrictive (and impossible) “identities”’ (75).

As we have already seen, Franko B’s performances attempt to strip the skin of its own identity. At the very least, they are performances which stretch the boundaries of the skin and body in an effort to show that they are not bounded systems of representation but open and permeable. Franko B makes us feel uncomfortable in our own skins because he uses his own to show that skin can be torn, stretched and even stripped away. Skin ‘is the most fragile of covers and also the most sticky. [It] becomes a metaphor for surface, for the external; it is the place of pleasure and the site of pain; it is the thin sheet that masks bloody horror’ as well as being ‘the destination of the gaze’ and ‘the violated site of visual pleasure’ (Halberstam 165).

And Franko B will not let his spectators forget that his performances are also a skin show in which he sheds his flesh. As Amelia Jones points out in her description of Franko B’s corporeal work *I Miss You* (2003), in which he walks several times across a ‘bloodied catwalk’ in Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall, ‘his feet stick to the blood after the first traversal, making a strange snapping, sucking sound as he extricates them.’ This ‘sucking sound’ is an acute reminder of his embodiment and reified bodily presence, his ‘thereness,’ at the same time as his live body becomes exteriorized and ‘staged like the objectified bodies in a fashion show, their agency evacuated by their production as fetishes “over there,” rendering the models “absent” subjects’ (par. 6).

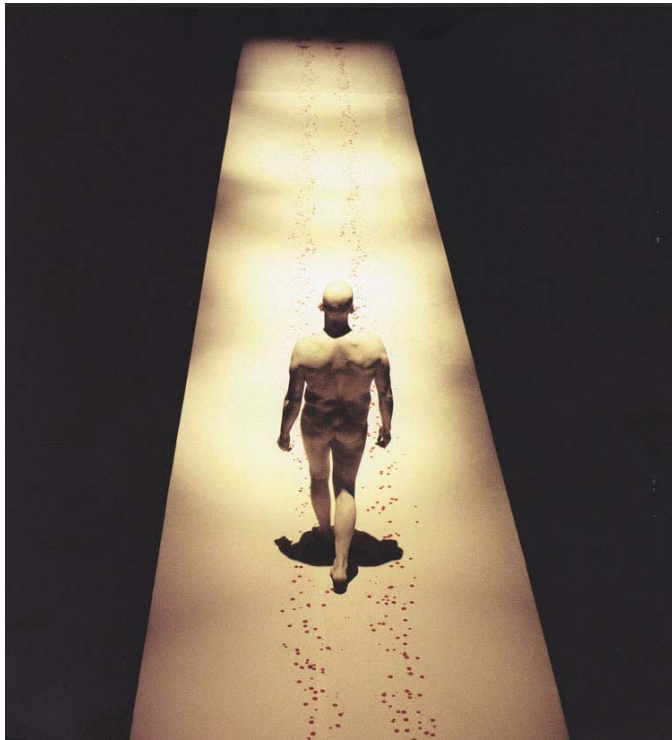


Plate 1.10 *Franko B, 'I Miss You', 2000. Photo: Manuel Vason.*

Franko B's fashion show becomes a skin show which implicates his audiences. Apart from his explicit desire to reach out to his audience, his performance is like a mock-fashion show which parodies the objectification of the subject on the catwalk. As Jennifer Doyle points out, 'the blood splattered canvas Franko leaves in his wake is used to make unwearable, or at least, un-marketable haute-couture, to mummify household objects, and to make pocket-sized souvenir paintings.' Such live art is reminiscent, perhaps, of the performances by the Japanese artist Yoko Ono. In her *Cut Piece* (1965) performance at Carnegie Hall in New York, Ono gave the audience scissors and allowed each of them to trim a portion of her dress until it was completely cut to shreds – a striptease in reverse. Her final performance was symbolically performed in Paris, the fashion capital of the world. Instead of marketing a proper dress, Ono allowed her audience to tear it apart as a blatant

demonstration of the objectifications enacted in and through consumerist and capitalist culture. Although Ono manages to modestly cover his breasts, her body remains naked and exposed. The voyeuristic aspects involved in such live performances can hardly be downplayed or ignored.

Nakedness is often linked to degradation, shame, vulnerability and even the state of otherness or abjection. One of the first references to nakedness occurs in the Bible in Genesis, when Adam and Eve become aware of their nakedness and use fig leaves to cover themselves. Ironically, however, although it is Franko B's white body which stands naked and exposed, it is his own nakedness which leaves the audience emotionally vulnerable. As Doyle astutely notes:

When an artist successfully overrides the self-consciousness and the inhibitions that settle on us in places like galleries and classrooms, it comes as a shock – finding ourselves overwhelmed with actual emotion – finding ourselves crying, laughing, afraid, disgusted, aroused, outraged – can leave us feeling a bit naked.

Particularly in masculine Western society, affective and emotional responses have often been frowned upon as being shameful and effeminate. We are ashamed of showing emotion, 'too much' emotion – of showing our own tears. As early as the fifth century, Plato saw the fearful dangers of plays which unleashed uncontrollable grief in their spectators. As Taxidou points out, female lamentation was banned 'around the sixth century BCE,' yet it does not vanish, becoming 'one of the most significant impulses behind the creation of tragic performance conventions.' Significantly, it is the banning of female lamentation in the Athenian *polis* which allows it to filter 'into the civic, political and discursive world of [its] male [citizens]' by way of theatrical conventions and public death rituals or funeral orations (*Tragedy, Modernity and Mourning* 89).

*Via* recourse to tragedy, the stage and public sphere can allegedly get rid of melancholy and institute pathos and didacticism in its place. Taxidou points out how

the chorus in Ancient Greek tragedy is often seen ‘as a simple interface between the individual and the collective, between form and content.’ It functions as a mediating force which channels female lamentation into knowledge and ‘a pedagogical experience’ (90). She quotes Benjamin, for whom ‘the chorus of tragedy does not lament. It remains detached in the presence of profound suffering; this refutes the idea of surrender to lamentation’ (89). Yet, as Taxidou very astutely points out, ‘choruses from *The Persians* to *The Bacchae*’ show clearly that ‘they can be unruly, lamenting, and highly subversive’ (90).

With all due respect to Benjamin, the life of the mind and speculative knowledge, there is something unsettling – I would even venture to say callous – about responding analytically to the humanity of dramatic actors (and the characters they embody) who physically come to life before us on stage and in performance. The very physical presence of the actor ensures that such responses are obviated, or at least watered down. Rush Rehm makes a compelling case for the lively engagement of spectators with Greek tragedy. His argument is worth quoting at some length:

If a distanced, scientific, objective response were all that was intended in Greek tragedy, then we would expect a different kind of writing and a different mode of presentation. As Aristotle points out, the great advance that tragedy made over epic was the appearance of characters as ‘living and moving before us’ (*Poetics*, 1448a.24-25), that is, characters as embodied. The physical presence of the actor defined the earliest drama, and the actor remains the irremovable obstacle in the path of those who view Greek tragedy (or the theatre in general) as a sophisticated playground for mental conundrums, as opposed to a place of live, and lived, human experience (46).

Similarly, Franko B demands our response, our emotional investment as his cut and ‘leaking’ body bleeds. His performances cannot be summed up analytically *via* recourse to speculative thinking alone.<sup>4</sup> This is because, like Orlan, his live performances attest to the physical presence of the body, the body as a material entity, as lived and embodied. It is all very well to attempt to uproot it from its pre-ontological status and ground it in some abstract framework of theoretical givens, but as David Harradine reminds us the body, the performing body, always

performs ‘its own material status.’ The body is produced and informed by complex ‘ideological and discursive systems.’ In and of itself, the body forms ‘the locus of complex processes of ideological construction’ which ‘materialise the body itself in and through discourse, and that reveal the body as only the *apparent* base from which notions of “identity” (such as “race” “sex” “gender” “class” or “sexuality” [*sic*]) can be read’ (69).

This is precisely why Franko B refuses to associate his work with gay culture since the very notion of ‘gayness’ would seal off the interpretative field through a formative construction of identity which reads his body as gay. At the same time, however, it is impossible to do away with such ideological constructions as gender, race and sexuality entirely. Franko B’s body is white – indeed, it is even painted white to stress its very ‘whiteness’ – as opposed to being black. As Amelia Jones very aptly suggests, Franko B’s work points to the absence of what Frantz Fanon identifies in *Black Skin, White Masks* as ‘the corporeal malediction,’ the malediction of blackness as constitutive of identity. She refers to black paintings which ‘serve as a kind of obverse of Franko B.’s signature whiter-than-white body (literally painted in glossy white makeup), enacted in his performance works’ (par. 3).

In the same way as Harradine stresses that ‘normal’ sexualities can only be conceptualised through their opposite, *via* recourse to correlative notions of those which are designated as aberrant or deviant, Jones makes the pertinent point that the presence of Franko B’s white body is a racial marker; his body can only be defined in relation to the absent black body, against which this putative whiteness – his race as a marker of identity – is defined. By having his body cut up, however, and then offering it up to the audience as a sacrifice, he performs – in Christ-like fashion – the ‘elegiac body of sorrows: Christ doloroso as icon of the ambivalence of twenty-first century white masculinity’ (Jones, par. 3).

Franko B's performances are thus embodied performances of race as well as gender. There is really no essentialist notion of gendered identity because Franko B performs his gender constantly through the complex ways in which performative acts and processes of subjectivization impinge upon and (re)inscribe his body. At the same time, it could also be argued that each performance is a repetitive act in which he performs his gender differently, thus paving the way for a critical reworking of gender norms in and through the very act of performing the body. According to Judith Butler, performativity and gender identity are ritualized and socially constructed acts which are constantly being re(enacted) and interrogated. She says: 'As in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated.' What is more, '[t]his repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimization.' The 'action' of gender is thus a public action as much as it is individually 'stylized into gendered modes' (*Gender Trouble* 40).<sup>5</sup>

In terms of gender politics, then, gender is at once both a 'thing done' to the subject through a pre-existing and oppressive matrix of socially established categories of signification, and a 'doing' of the subject, a performance which constantly attempts to disrupt and destabilize these social categories. At the same time, since performance is an exteriorization of the body, it points to the potential ways in which the body can be 'manipulated' and made to 'signify in politically useful and suggestive ways' (Harradine 75). For Josette Féral the very act of performing the body marks its conspicuousness as a body which is always already repressed – the body-in-pieces:

The body is made conspicuous: a body in pieces, fragmented and yet one, a body perceived and rendered *as a place of desire*, displacement, and fluctuation, a body the performance conceives of as repressed and tries to free – even at the cost of greater violence (171).

Through performance the body ‘tries to free’ itself (or rather to *flee*) from its own repression and the social strictures imposed upon it. Franko B enacts and performs the fluidity and permeability of the body as an attempt to escape such strictures. He turns the social system on its head by refusing the textual and ideological strictures it imposes on his body and by refusing to have his body ‘read’ as a closed system of signification. At the very least, his performances raise interesting questions about how the body can be viewed in performance and how it encodes itself into a kind of ‘text through which embodied subjectivities can be enacted’ (Marney 63). Additionally, his performances raise the problem of maintaining essentialist notions of socially/discursively constructed and sexed identities.

The problem is further compounded by Franko B’s ambivalent status as performer-as-subject and/or sacrificial object, an indeterminacy which paradoxically allows him to liminally occupy both positions at the same time. In Christ-like fashion, Franko B offers himself up as a scapegoat for society’s ills and asks his spectators to mourn for him as he proffers them his tormented and bloodied body, and even to identify with the painful disruption of its seeming ‘boundedness’ and unity. As Staten compellingly reminds us: ‘The phenomena of the dialectic of mourning all arise out of the affect of self-attachment that we could describe in Freudian terms as the narcissistic libidinal cathexis of the boundary of integrity of the self.’ Physical pain and death disrupt this boundary. In effect, death, or ‘the thought of death’ can be seen as being ‘the ultimate psychic pain, the ineliminable gap that keeps the circle of the self from closing against the intrusion of the not-self’ (8).

As we have seen, Franko B’s performances are stark reminders to the audience of their own mortality. They are skin shows which perform the fluidity of the body as abject; the audience is privy to a performance in which a leaking body, in corpse-like

fashion, is being stripped of its flesh and is literally falling to pieces. What makes the performance even more compelling is the fact that Franko B is not the one who is making the cuts on his body. His is a body which is 'acted upon' by invisible hands off-stage. Like Christ (and unlike other sacrificial martyrs after Him), he does not inflict his own wounds. This functions as a symbolic reminder perhaps that the self is constantly being attacked on all sides by invisible and yet powerful social forces. Thus Franko B dispels our fantasies of the bounded and unfragmented subject.<sup>6</sup>

It is significant that Franko B's performances can be read as acts of symbolic wounding which bear ritualistic, religious and even shamanistic connotations. In certain tribes the shaman is often the spiritual healer or leader who is chosen for his psychic capacities to mediate between the visible and spiritual worlds. As Sally O'Reilly notes: 'The shamanic root relates to the recognisable traits of performance as ordeal, inspiration, therapy or trance, as the artist executes a ritual of cleansing or communication' (2). Thus shamans take upon themselves the role of 'healing the illnesses and reversing the misfortunes of the members of their community' (Favazza 25). In order to become a shaman an individual must undergo lengthy periods of bodily mutilation and intense 'experiences of suffering' (25).<sup>7</sup>

Similar initiatory rites of passage are also incorporated into Franko B's performances. In some cases he ritually uses a bowl to wash his hands and then pours its contents over his head, a ritual which has clear associations with purification and baptism. Blood is often spattered all over his body and remains the most significant bodily fluid emphasized in his work. David Harradine correctly points this out when he suggests that blood 'is perhaps the *most* metaphorically loaded body fluid' (80). Blood can be defined as being both sacred and profane in religious practices. For Kristeva it is a prominent signifier of the abject and it is within religious protocols

that the abject is both defined and designated. In *Powers of Horror* she traces the restrictive strictures of Christian doctrine ranging from blood to sexual identity. She concludes that within this doctrine heterosexuality is perceived as being the normative regime, whilst homosexuality is explicitly condemned as being impure and unclean, and thus relegated to an abject status.

As Harradine suggests, it is the body of the homosexual which produces fear because it is a body which is ‘*improperly* contained and diffuse, permeable, fluid and penetrated.’ It is a body which has been ‘infected’ with social stigma:

Therefore, the signification of gay male blood (blood which flows right through the performance pieces of Franko B.) becomes legible as a certain kind of reference to the abject not only *as* blood itself, and indeed not “only” as it becomes subsumed under the infectious and abject logic of AIDS discourse, but also through a feminising association with menstrual blood, and therefore with that which Kristeva identifies as one of the most “privileged” signifiers of abjection (79-80).

Thus although Franko B claims his work has nothing or little to do with AIDS and gay culture the very fact that he refuses these associations – that he claims their very absence – comes back to ‘infect’ his work. Absence does not mean or signify non-presence. Through the associations of blood Franko B’s body becomes relegated to the status of the marginally ‘other’ in male Western society. His blood becomes linked to abject menstrual fluids and contagion, ‘the infectious and abject logic of AIDS discourse.’ We have already seen in Chapter Five how Favazza associated self-induced cuts with orchestrated outlets for menses – female self-cutters feel more empowered because cutting is a symbolic form of menstruation which is ‘vicarious,’ predictable and regulated (165). The biomedical discourse surrounding clean and impure blood is more transparent; it is a discourse which operates *via* representational identifications in the service of heteronormative constructions of sexual identity. Clean blood marks the ‘self-contained’ and sovereign body, whereas correlatively bad blood marks the permeable and infected body. And this logic of a ‘normative’ regime

spreads and infects all ‘representational discourses that circulate around contemporary constructions of sexualities and identities’ (Harradine 78).

Thus it is significant that Franko B uses his own blood in his performances. By using his blood as well as other bodily fluids, he can engage with these representational discourses and destabilize, even implode, their normative logic. In this respect, his blood play is a radical and political act.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, his performances appear more like a collective spectacle than a private ordeal. Yet they are a spectacle of a kind of ‘holy’ communion or bloody Eucharist at the end of which the audience can witness Franko B’s ‘resurrected’ body. After the resurrection the members of the audience are not offered bread but – to quote Doyle once more – a bloodied canvas of ‘unwearable, or at least, un-marketable haute-couture.’

One is reminded of Peter Brook’s notion of a ‘holy’ theatre which functions as a communal space of catharsis. As the spectators share in Franko B’s Eucharist they too can experience the same catharsis as the actor and ‘enter into the performance emotionally,’ becoming ‘at one with it.’ This presupposes that catharsis is universal: ‘Divorced from reality yet reflecting it, communal theatre carries artists and audience together to a level of universal emotional response then returns them to quotidian reality with a keener sense of the psychic structures shared by all people.’ Such a typified response attests to Carl Jung’s conception of a collective unconscious (Auslander 19).

Such benign and somewhat optimistic interpretations of the theatrical experience would clearly have no space in Artaud’s ‘Theatre of Cruelty.’ At the same time, it seems too simplistic to believe that all people, no matter what their gender, ethnic or racial background, would emotionally (and physically) react in the same way to a live performance. This is precisely why the notion of a ‘communal’ catharsis seems to me

to be a somewhat moot point. It may be the goal of the performance itself to achieve this end-result, yet whether or not this result is actually achieved is an entirely different matter. Franko B's abused and fragmented body, which is invaded and hence spontaneously spills out its interior bodily fluids, may provoke the audience's identificatory sympathy, but it can also cause very visceral responses of revulsion and disgust. At the other end of the spectrum, it may even activate aggressive and sadomasochistic impulses and a 'thirst' for blood. We have already seen how certain audiences jeered Franko B off the stage and bayed for his blood.<sup>9</sup>

Although Franko B claims, like Orlan, that his work is not about sadomasochism, he is aware of the fact that we are all implicated in a society in which sadomasochistic acts and images are everyday fare. He himself came from a dysfunctional family. His father was absent during his childhood, his mother used to abuse him and call him 'Franko the Dog,' and even locked him up at night in a box. For him 'S/M is an inevitable thing in society' (Campbell and Spackman 67). As he says in an interview with Caryn Simonson about his more recent work, people get disappointed when he tells them that he is not working with blood anymore. For them he is the 'bleeding man':

Twenty years ago nobody wanted to see blood and now they want to see it. I'm the "bleeding man." When I'm asked if I might be contacted about doing some work, I want to be contactable to do something about nature, I want to be contacted about digging a hole. Do you know what I mean? We've done blood, we've done the body. People have been working on the body for years. We all bleed inside (322).

As Franko B makes clear, the body has limits. Thus while it has been claimed that he refuses to give his spectators cathartic release, he himself has ended his performances because of the overly taxing physical demands they impose upon the body: "They ask why I'm not doing it, because I can't do it any more, I can't open the

tap any longer” (Simonson 322). It takes extreme physical effort and a great deal of pain to turn the ‘inside’ outside, to make the body bleed for oneself and for others.

He performs the singularity of trauma within the communal context of remembering the marginalized ‘other’ and phenomenologically positions his body as a permeable and vulnerable body that bleeds and feels pain. In other words, he politicizes the aesthetic as much as he aestheticizes the political and the body politic. Through drama, theatre and performance he can ‘act out’ this trauma of the bleeding body that has been abjected, cast aside and ostracized in society. Through repetition he renegotiates the spatio-temporal relationships between performance, acting out and working through within the context of an ‘aesthetics’ of the traumatic.

The terms ‘acting out’ and ‘working through’ are taken directly from Freud, the former being strongly linked to repetition and transference and the latter being often associated with a will to remember and hence achieve a sense of recovery or end-result. According to Dominick LaCapra the two are intimately linked and not oppositional. ‘In the working through, the person tries to gain critical distance on a problem, to be able to distinguish between past, present and future’ (2). Yet there is very often an affinity or ‘tendency to become fixated on acting-out, on the repetition-compulsion, to see it as a way of preventing closure, harmonization, any facile notion of cure.’ At the same time, and by way of the same logic, there is an inclination ‘to eliminate any other possibility of working-through, or simply to identify all working-through as closure, totalization, full cure, full mastery, so that there’s a kind of all-or-nothing logic’ which leads us to a kind of ‘double bind: either the totalization or the closure you resist; or acting-out the repetition-compulsion, with almost no other possibilities’ (3).

Such a binary system precludes the possibility of critical thinking and leads politically to what LaCapra identifies as ‘a kind of blank hope in the future’ (3). However, when Franko B opens up his body he renegotiates this double-bind logic and implicitly asks his audience to do the same. In short, he is asking his audience to take some form of responsibility for his bleeding body and to attempt ‘to work out some very delicate relationship between empathy and critical distance’ (LaCapra 4-5). It is my contention that such a balanced relationship can only be achieved through the possibility of Adam Smith’s notion of sympathetic identification but also through that of remembrance – remembrance of trauma, of the marginalized body and the (re)inscriptions of trauma on that body. This is why Franko B’s work has such political resonance. And this is evident even in works where his physical body is not the visual marker.

As Caryn Simonson points out, Franko B has used cloth in many of his installations and object-based pieces. ‘Cloth has an uncanny ability to trigger memories – its qualities can cause it to be marked temporarily or stained indelibly by the body leaving it permanently “scarred.”’ Like the body, cloth tells its own ‘story’ because it ‘can record memory and evoke this through the absorption of smell, stain, and other human trace’ (Simonson 315). This is particularly significant because Franko B uses blood-stained cloth from his own performances to wrap up some of his objects, which then function as works of art. The ‘trace’ of his own body can be found on this cloth and acts as a tangible reminder of his bleeding performances. At the same time, the cloth functions as a kind of ‘second skin’ which is used to wrap up the objects (315). It is almost as if, metaphorically speaking, the objects are bleeding from the inside out.

Like live performances, Franko B's object-based works have a life of their own.<sup>10</sup> And, like his performances, they also tend to play on the idea of interior versus exterior surfaces. Cloth 'touches the skin' but also functions as a kind of outer surface or covering (Simonson 315). Judith Halberstam considers the theoretical underpinnings behind the horror film's queer tendency to conflate outer cloth with inner skin in its reconfigurations of gender politics and identity. She also considers the Gothic as a genre which is steeped in violence and what she calls 'costume dramas,' Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* being a case in point. For her 'Gothic is a cross-dressing, drag, a performance of textuality, an infinite readability' (60). It is through this outer performance of 'dressing' or 'cross-dressing' that infinite possibilities for 'reading' the skin and identity may emerge: 'Someone's skin, their hide (Hyde), precisely forms the surface through which inner identities emerge and upon which external readings of identity leave their impression' (Halberstam 141). In the same way, Franko B's performances and object-based works leave external markings and impressions of his identity. They consistently focus on the skin 'and the shredding, ripping, or tearing of skin as a spectacle of identity performance and its breakdown' (141). Additionally, they attest to the possibilities of skin – it can be stretched and 'reused' to create other identities.<sup>11</sup>

Apart from worn-out, everyday objects such as shoes and bicycles, Franko B has also used hospital equipment such as bandages, calipers, syringes and operating tables in his works. In his *Mama, I Can't Sing* performance (1995/6), performed at the London Institute of Contemporary Arts, his thorax and back are cut by invisible hands and he is then bandaged by 'white-clad assistants' (Campbell and Spackman 59-60). In one sequence he 'appears as a mummified body swathed in bandages, cramped in calipers, and caged like a dangerous beast' while in others a catheter is seen

protruding from his penis as he walks around the hospital setting with a drip (Campbell and Spackman 61-2). All of these visual images serve to emphasize the vulnerability of the body, as well as its passivity towards its own 'medicalized' and instrumented status.

In *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* Foucault examines the passivity of the body under the clinician's medical gaze. He traces a genealogical medical history which served to give rise to the 'birth' of the clinic and illustrates how in the Enlightenment period the doctor was seen as being wise and knowledgeable, able to examine the body with a 'clinical' and 'observing' gaze and thus penetrate its secrets and provide an accurate diagnosis. All symptoms and diseases were subsumed under a categorized rubric and yielded their secrets to the penetrating gaze of the clinician. He writes:

In the depths of its being, disease follows the obscure, but necessary ways of tissual reactivations. But what now becomes of its visible body, that set of phenomena without secrets that makes it entirely legible for the clinician's gaze: that is, recognizable by its signs, but also decipherable in the symptoms whose totality defined its essence without residue (159).

During the Enlightenment the body became visible to the clinician's gaze, able to be categorized, classified and diagnosed. In short, the whole body could be summed up by recourse to its body parts. New tests allowed the clinician to gaze at and examine the naked body. Particularly in the eighteenth century medical knowledge expanded and the body became an object that could be mapped with mathematical precision. Diseases and contagions could be classified in new ways and physicians now began to describe symptoms and phenomena that had eluded medical practitioners for many centuries, phenomena that until then had remained below the threshold of the visible, the understandable and even the expressible.

In a sense, Franko B's performances could elicit this exacting 'medicalized' and clinical gaze. As he lies down on the operating table and allows the white-clad assistants to cut up and dissect his body, he becomes like a passive or 'mummified' object which is surgically invaded and yet accepts and receives this invasion and instrumentalization of his body. Like silent clinicians, the spectators can dissect Franko B's naked body under their 'clinically' accurate gaze. As Campbell and Spackman point out, 'Franko's unmediated work is enacted only bloody feet away from his watchers' (58). They may not be privy to some of the gory details involved in the dissection, but they are there throughout the entire duration of the performance, silently observing the bloody spectacle. The effect is further compounded by the creation of a hospital-like setting, since hospitals are places which are traditionally associated with disease and contagion, even death, as well as by the technological presence of 'synthesized soundtracks' which serve to 'remind the audience of the grating and whirring of machines, the occasional bleeps and sustained single tones of heart monitors' (60).

Since Franko B does not deploy any language in his performances the occasional whirrs and bleeps of the machines create a space very much like Kristeva's semiotic chora as opposed to the symbolic order. Kristeva is indebted to Nietzsche here for her formulation of the two terms: the *symbolic* and the *semiotic*. As Ellmann notes, the former is 'dominated by the father, the phallus, and the law,' whereas the latter is 'haunted by the vengeful traces of a lost pre-Oedipal maternal world.' In *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) Nietzsche sets up an opposition 'between the Apollonian and Dionysian principles' and Kristeva draws on this opposition, likening the semiotic to the Dionysian and the Apollonian to the symbolic. The former principle 'is associated with sonority and rhythm, with the *stuff* of speech, in which language coalesces with

the body and the orchestration of the drives; whereas the *symbolic*, like the Apollonian, articulates these primal forces into rational, intelligible forms' (Ellmann 25).

Hence the semiotic is a place which is prelinguistic even though it is intimately linked with language, 'the place where the subject is both generated and negated, the place where his [*sic*] unity succumbs before the process of charges and stases that produce him [*sic*].'<sup>12</sup> The semiotic is associated with drives, as well as with tones and rhythms which 'are meaningful parts of language and yet do not represent or signify something' (Oliver 38). The element of signification is achieved *via* recourse to the symbolic order, yet it is the semiotic itself which 'provides the motivation for engaging in signifying processes. We have a bodily need to communicate. And, the symbolic provides the structure necessary to communicate. Both elements are essential to signification' (38). Between structure and bodily drives, soma and psyche, signification becomes both possible and dynamic.

By the same token, Franko B uses his body to communicate. Through the semiotic element of language he expresses his bodily drives, the experience of having – and even feeling – a body. 'The tones and rhythms of language, the materiality of language, are bodily. Signification is like a transfusion of the living body into language' (Oliver 39). Through bodily gestures and the technological whirrs and bleeps Franko B is able to bring his body to life and make it materially and linguistically signify. Between soma and psyche, biology and representation, the semiotic and the symbolic, lies the potential for transforming flesh into language and for turning bodily pain into a linguistic register.

We have already noted how the body can function as a text upon which multiple subjectivities can be enacted and reenacted through performative acts. As Amelia

Jones and Andrew Stephenson point out in their Introduction to *Performing the Body/Performing the Text*, the process of interpretation, hermeneutic activity in general, is communicative and object-based, whereas bodily performance is textual and constituted by and through signifying processes:

Interpretation *is*, we would argue, a kind of performance of the object, while the performance of the body as an artistic practice *is* a mode of textual inscription. The body (as the corporeal enactment of the subject) is known and experienced only through its representational performances – whether presented ‘live,’ in photographs, videos, films, on the computer screen, or through the interpretative text itself. Interpretation, like the production of works of art, is a mode of communication. Meaning is a process of engagement and never dwells in any one place (8).

To interpret is to objectify, whilst performance is a subjective activity around which meaning is constructed.<sup>13</sup> This is why it is counterintuitive to assign decisive interpretations or conclusive readings to performative works. As Harradine points out in relation to Franko B’s work, ‘to ascribe a decisive interpretation’ is to operate ‘in contradiction to the artist’s own resistance to the rationalisation of his work through any one critical schema.’ At the same time, he touches upon an important point, ‘that to *write* about a performance is necessarily to change that performance in and through the act of writing’ (70). Because performance art is marked by its ontological consistency and impermanence, the very act of documenting it transmogrifies its status *as* performance art. This is why Peggy Phelan claims that performance art ‘cannot be documented (when it is, it turns into that document – a photograph, a stage design, a video tape – and ceases to be performance art’ (qtd. in Harradine 70). This is not to suggest, however, that the affective force of such performances cannot be documented, or that theoretical frameworks cannot be employed in our attempts to describe the performative event, to traverse the limits imposed upon us by the actual medium and ‘puncture and tear open theoretical skins’ only to have them ‘disappear again’ (Harradine 70).

As we have already seen, Derrida argues in *Passages – from Traumatism to Promise* that the composition of a poem, for example, marks a significant event. To date a work of art such as a poem is to mark it with a ‘wound’ which is effaced at the very moment it is inscribed. More precisely, the date of a poem’s composition marks its singularity as an event at the same time as that singularity is necessarily lost in that date’s very iterability. And this argument holds good for all experiences in general, since ‘all experience is the experience of a singularity.’ The aspiration to maintain this singularity – to keep it as it is – ‘is what effaces it right away’ (378). The performative event is a singular one which can never be repeated in the same way. Even if it were possible to do so, the event’s very iterability would (paradoxically) put that event under constant erasure. The singular moment of the performative act can never be recaptured, and neither can ‘that moment at which [the performer’s] transient presence fades into memory’ (Harradine 70).

As we have noted earlier, the same can be said of any attempts to document traumatic events. By its very nature trauma cannot be represented. For trauma becomes both repetition and mimesis and is ‘not merely subject to recurrence but to the recurrence of recurrence itself’ (Seltzer 265). This is especially pertinent since Franko B, like Orlan, uses machinic and technological devices to impinge upon and stretch the body’s boundaries. The body’s mediation with technology both transforms (even cancels) it and prosthetically extends its possibilities *ad infinitum*. Trauma, the mimetic compulsion itself, is mimetized ‘in the transfers between what is inside us and the machine’ (265). Like other performance artists such as Stelarc, who uses the most advanced robotic technology to refashion his body, Franko B collapses the material body into the abstract body-machine-image complex by merging life and machinic processes. Especially in works such as *Mama, I Can’t Sing* he asserts ‘the

inseparability of materialities of communication and forms of violence in machine culture' (265).

The fact that trauma is mimetized or simulated does not mean that it is any less poignant; in fact, it is its very mimetization which reproduces and duplicates the trauma once more. Its very mimetization leads to its obliteration and effacement, which serves to reawaken the trauma once again in an endless, repetitive cycle. Although Stelarc would claim that the body is now 'obsolete' (Judith Palmer, par. 1), there really is no escaping the body. All performance art starts at the body. Franko B works with his body in order to mutilate and transform it with the machine technology near the operating table. Arguably, it is not the body which becomes obsolete but all fixed and rigid social constructions which surround the body and attempt to inscribe and define it within set parameters of sex, gender and identity.

Franko B's wounds, formed by technology, open out an infinite plenitude of future possibilities; they are inexhaustibly iterable; erotic, visual, religious and enigmatic signifiers which are constantly circulating in the symbolic, technical economy of his performances. And, as we have already seen, wounds are switch-points between public and private registers, inner and outer worlds. They are as much social as they are private, as much 'embodied' as they are objectified. As such, they do not meaninglessly circulate in this symbolic and technological economy; they mark an event, a performative event which in itself has made this repetitive circulation of signifiers or wound-signs possible. The wound-signs themselves evidence the trauma of the performative event; trauma returns, or rather it recurs in the circulation of these wound-signs. What is more, this iterable circulation of signifiers attests to the fact that the recurrence of the trauma *itself* is traumatic. The performance is a traumatic one for both Franko B and for many of his spectators.<sup>14</sup>

There is a temporal gap for the spectators between the event's performance and their belated interpretation of it – or rather, between its performance and their attempts at interpretation. To quote Diamond: 'Is this not the relation of the realist actor to his/her audience – the actor produces *symptoms* addressed to spectators, who gradually understand their meanings?' (*Unmaking Mimesis* 30, italics mine). The notion of a 'symptom' here takes us back to the psychoanalytic transference itself, 'the re-experiencing of past relations, past emotions in the presence of an analyst/spectator.' At the same time the performance 'also induces a counter-transference, an identification of spectator with actor/character.' According to Freud, this identification is a masochistic position, both feminine and passive (30).

Brechtian theory would obviously reject such identifications in its firm commitments 'to produc[ing] a spectator/reader who is not interpellated into ideology but is passionately and pleurably engaged in observation and analysis' (*Unmaking Mimesis* 44). Yet Doyle's emotional investment in (rather than her distancing from) the performance, her recourse to tears as she watches Franko B performing, could hardly be described as an A-effect or even a 'pleasurable' engagement. Indeed, the technique of alienation seems to be a far cry from what Franko B intended, even though he simultaneously resists offering his body as an identifiable and fetishized object to his spectators.<sup>15</sup> I would suggest that he invites his spectators to find a medium ground or viable position between complete identification and total 'de-affectation' or emotional distancing.

Certainly it may be difficult to identify with a performer who 'invades' upon his body with technical and surgical implements – and does so out of a personal choice. At the same time, however, the mediation between the body and the machine in performance opens out infinite possibilities, many horrific, others more promising. As

Chris Gray points out in *Cyborg Citizen: Politics in the Postmodern Age*, ‘the proliferation of cyborgs is the promise of monsters, the promise of possibilities. Horror is possible, perhaps inevitable. But resistance, even joy, should be just as possible’ (195).<sup>16</sup> Blurring and transgressing boundaries between machinic and life processes, the body and the machine, is both dangerous and exciting. Yet it can also be liberating, particularly if we are able (ideally) to ‘choose the borders we inhabit and transgress’ (195-6). By seemingly making this transgression a self-conscious choice, Franko B forces us to consider our own individual choices and liberties.

As Richard Sclove points out in *Democracy and Technology*, the political choices we make can lead to ‘a more democratic technological order’ which enhances, even multiplies, our individual freedoms:

It is possible to evolve societies in which people live in greater freedom, exert greater influence on their circumstances, and experience greater dignity, self-esteem, purpose, and well-being. The route to such a society must include struggles toward democratic institutions for evolving a more democratic technological order. Is it realistic to envision a democratic politics of technology? Isn’t it unrealistic not to? (Sclove qtd. in Gray 198)

Certainly Sclove’s vision is idyllic, even nostalgic, but not impossible. Performance artists like Stelarc and Orlan are already ‘hanging out with machines, redesigning [their] body by melding [their] flesh with the latest robotic technology’ (Judith Palmer, par. 1), whilst Franko B has already tested the limits of his body through fluid blood play in performance and through the use of technical instruments. While sublating the boundaries of sex and technology, body and machine, may be dangerous, there are also many liberating possibilities, and modern technology may actually benefit us in the future as well, ‘provid[ing] us with hitherto undreamed-of means for tapping our own psychopathologies’ (Ballard 6). New techno-sexual possibilities may loom in the near-future horizons of the technological landscape. By exploring *our* possibilities we may even find that they are endless and positively

limitless. Who knows what the future holds, what monsters and angels lurk within its unfathomable realm? We can only dream or surmise. And Ballard sums it up better than I can: 'Over the profiles of [our bodies] now preside the metallized excitements of our shared dreams of technology' (41).

## Conclusion

The main aim of my research has been to focus on the triadic relationship between theatre, trauma and vision *via* recourse to psychoanalytical, phenomenological, semiological and feminist frameworks. At every step along the way I have attempted to show how a synchronic model of trauma, that is, the notion of a trauma that crosses time and space and effectively transcends them, can be used as an interpretative tool or bulwark through which to read certain texts and performances. At the same time, I have tried to broaden our understanding of trauma through vision and thus illustrate how sight or its lack thereof can function as traumatic.

I have specifically chosen two playwrights and two performers whose works deal explicitly with the question of seeing (or not seeing), various ways of looking as well as the tragic implications of looking ‘at’ an event, ‘away’ from it or even not at all. While clearly not all acts of seeing engender some form of trauma, I have started with the basic premise or assumption that the sense of physically looking at something painful or disturbing can – and often does – lead to psychological trauma. There have certainly been many developments in the study of psychological and physical trauma from the late nineteenth century onwards. More generally, there has been a relative *shift* in emphasis, starting with Freud and onwards, from physical to psychological trauma. At the same time, there has been a general tendency to overlook the question of sight in trauma theory, together with the question of how certain sights/sites both on and off the stage can actually lead to traumatic neurosis or even nervous breakdown.

My work has attempted to briefly sketch the various developments in trauma theory and to look at seminal works in this area, works such as those of Cathy Caruth and Judith Herman, who examine the circularity of trauma, its relegation to amnesic

status and the notion of trauma as something external and coming from without. Since I envision sight as trauma and the act of looking as both literal and figurative manifestations, I have also drawn on theorists such as Laplanche, Abraham and Torok in order to show how the question of vision is linked to non-verbal and extra-linguistic cues as much as it is rooted in material language. I have specifically chosen Laplanche because he differs from other theorists in the psychoanalytical field and because his notion of a hieroglyph or an enigmatic signifier to account for trauma can redress the somewhat too formalist and linguistic approach taken by Lacan (whom Laplanche in fact criticizes) in this area.

While Freud studies the psychological aspects of traumatic vision in his examination of Sophocles' classical play *Oedipus Rex*, claiming that Oedipus's removal of his eyes is a variant of the castration complex, he does not specifically focus on the dynamics of vision and the metaphoricity involved in the literal blinding. At the same time, he downplays the importance of the mother-child relationship in his formulation of a triangulated Oedipal schema. One of Laplanche's main strengths lies in readdressing and subsequently redressing this oversight.

In Freud's rendition of a primal scene between a young boy-child and its parents (Freud asserts at first that the process is somewhat similar for girls, although he later makes revisions and modifications such that the processes of achieving a resolution differ) vision is closely bound into trauma, as the little boy averts his eyes from what he interprets to be his mother's 'wound' – the physical gap or wound, that is, of not having a penis. This is closely tied in with issues of knowledge and self-consciousness, what the boy figuratively envisions in his mind's eye as being the correct way of looking at his mother.

Yet what happens when there is a disjunction between what the eye/I mentally perceives and physically sees? Does this not lead to trauma? And if so, how is this trauma to be interpreted and – subsequently – assimilated into the subject's life narrative? Does viewing trauma – the traumatized or wounded body – in performance differ in any way from this interpretative schema? And, furthermore, if it does not, what are the gendered implications of this in relation to differentiated acts and ways of looking?

I have attempted to address all of these questions throughout my work. The starting point has been Sophocles' play because it lends itself so well to what Jay defines as the ocularcentric discourse in Western tradition, saturated as it is in theatrical and contextual tropes of sight, the frantic preoccupation or obsession with looking (linked as it is with the question of 'knowing' or finding out the truth) and the very real dangers involved in acts of (non)looking. Oedipus's self-blinding is the crucial and key moment of the play, a pivotal moment which metaphorically opens the floodgates of interpretation and allows us, as readers and analysts, to look for the answers. Additionally, while the whole play is constantly preoccupied with questions of literal or figurative sight and blindness, the moment where Oedipus actually removes his eyes is the moment where literal and metaphorical become one, where physical and psychological trauma are seen to interact on the level of representation.

As viewers of this somewhat horrendous and imagined spectacle (I say imagined because it is not enacted on stage so we have to envision it in our mind's eye), we cannot help but 'see' the tragedy involved in hubristically asserting one's self-authority at the expense of others, as well as the limitations imposed upon the individual by both society and biological determinants. Such a moral lesson would certainly have resonated with Athenian audiences at the time of Sophocles, since

Oedipus's self-assertion was in defiance of the gods and thus liable to exact a grave punishment from them. Although the notion of subjectivity was unheard of in classical antiquity, it is safe to assume that the play's moral messages would have struck home with full force.

Similar assumptions can be made for the viewers of the Elizabethan stage. For them *Macbeth* is a stark reminder of the grave and tragic punishment which must be necessarily incurred by the protagonist when he drains the blood of the fountain or godhead in the figure of the king, God's divine representative on earth. For more modern audiences it is also a moral message on the tragic consequences which may accrue when one has overleaping or 'vaulting ambition' (I.VII.27). What is more, murder is a gruesome and bloody business, and the after-effects of Macbeth's crime resound far and wide for him and contemporary, as well as more modern, audiences.

It is extremely significant that, in a play so saturated with visual and theatrical metaphors and visual motifs, the crucial moment of King Duncan's murder is not enacted onstage. The event's violent affect is displaced belatedly onto its after-effects, such that the trauma is not experienced at the time of its occurrence but only subsequently. The belatedness of trauma, its 'afterwardsness' (Nachträglichkeit), is experienced through recurring visual markers. The blood will not come off Macbeth's hands and will reappear in Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene, for 'all/ the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand' (V.I.48-9). No matter how hard Lady Macbeth rubs her hands, the traumatic vestiges of her crime return to haunt her in her sleep. Thus even if the blood is no longer there and can no longer be seen, it is metaphorically and symbolically present as a marker of visual trauma.

This raises important questions about (non)vision and the circularity of trauma evidenced through Lady Macbeth's recurrent conjuring up of the sight of blood. Lady

Macbeth attempts to seal off the visual and interpretative field in order to avoid 'seeing' things more clearly – and hence interpreting them retrospectively. In her performances she repetitively performs the performativity of trauma through sight. Sadly, she fails to obtain a kind of mastery through repetition – the blood will not go away because of her persistent refusal to see it literally rather than solely through her dreams. She performs her trauma imagistically and through 'iconic' representations, 'on a somatosensory or *iconic* level' (Rosenberg 41) and via recourse to flashbacks, yet fails to linguistically interpret this trauma and to make it directly available to experience, to link, that is, symptom with event, signifier (word/gesture) with signified (message/meaning). It is between this signifying gap or lacuna – the failure of interpretation – that trauma lies.

As Caruth points out, there is for Freud a temporal 'unlocatability' in the experiencing of trauma. Trauma is really a 'missed experience': '[It] is thus not the direct experience of the threat, but precisely the *missing* of this experience, the fact that, not being experienced *in time*, it has not yet been fully known.' When traumatic experiences occur in dreams they do not signal the experience directly. Rather, they signal 'the attempt to overcome the fact that it was *not* direct' and hence point to the 'attempt[s] to master what was never fully grasped in the first place' (62). At the same time, trauma attempts to 'speak out' and address the other. Lady Macbeth reaches out to her audience and makes them bear witness to her trauma.

We have already seen how trauma can function as a traumatic spectacle and performance which is endlessly simulated, reproduced or 'mimetized.' In short, trauma is performative; it is something which can be envisioned and cyclically reproduced or performed. It is precisely this cyclical repetition of trauma which becomes a visible phenomenon both in real life and on stage. The theatre itself is

already etymologically linked to sight, whereas critical interpretations of theatrical discourse have often linked the theatre and the stage to the body, particularly the maternal body. As Taxidou points out in *Tragedy, Modernity and Mourning*, ‘the relationship with the stage is primarily one of topology (of bodies, things and places)’ (92). Performances are, by their very nature, real and *embodied* events.

Similarly, traumatic events are manifested in and through the body. As Babette Rothschild points out, ‘the body remembers traumatic experiences’ (3). The body is a storehouse of sensory experiences, somatic memories and messaging systems. In spite of this, most clinicians and theorists have agreed that trauma cannot be represented linguistically. As Adorno’s famous dictum goes, there can be no poetry after Auschwitz. This is not to suggest, of course, that trauma should be relegated to a kind of amnesic status, only to point out the very real difficulties involved in representing trauma and writing or speaking about it. Whatever the case may be, trauma attempts to *speak*, even if not always through tangible and linguistic forms of expression. Indeed, this is precisely why Laplanche’s notion of an ‘enigmatic’ signifier can prove useful as a psychotherapeutic tool and in our attempts to interpret the enigma behind traumatic experiences – their failure, that is, to lend themselves to linguistic schemas and definitive representations.

Enigmatic signifiers signify the enigma of trauma itself. They are fluid, extra-linguistic and primarily visual. Like the child, traumatized individuals have no fixed and pre-existing linguistic code to interpret what has happened to them. Even if they possessed such a code in advance, any interpretation of the event can only occur in its aftermath and retrospectively. And the same goes for all theatrical performances of trauma; the actor, as well as the spectators, can only interpret the singular and theatrical event of the performativity of trauma after it has been already performed.

There is a temporal disjunction between viewing and experiencing the traumatized body in performance. In Chapter Six, for example, I note the difficulties Harradine encounters in writing about Franko B's performances. The performances themselves, as well as their affective power, 'unexpectedly intrude and interrupt only to suddenly disappear again, but of course never *again*, for that would be to deny that single loss – that moment at which their transient presence fades into memory – which can *never* be repeated' (70). In the blinking of an eye, the moment of *Augenblick*, the performative moment simply fades away.

Although writing about performances is a belated process, and although the act of writing about performances necessarily changes their status as real and embodied events through the linguistic processes of representation and documentation, this should not deter us from attempting to record and critically analyse the affective and bodily responses to traumatic representations both on the stage and in real life. In many cases, trauma is triggered by visual signs and markers. Thus my work has attempted to delineate and flesh out a theoretical model of vision or, to be more precise, a model of vision which functions as traumatic and against which various texts and performances can be read.

Obviously there are many different ways of looking at particular traumatic events. Indeed, we may even specifically choose to 'not' look at them. Bergson has laid great emphasis on the fact that the body is a vehicle of free choice. Yet we are all implicated in various 'acts' of looking every day. For Foucault these acts are hostile, while for others they are more benign. For the French Marxist theorist Guy Debord we are all caught up in a society of the spectacle, and spectacle can serve as a very powerful and depoliticizing tool in pacifying the masses. Yet while a lot has been written on the politics of the gaze and theoretical models of trauma by clinicians,

existentialists, philosophers, empiricists and literary theorists, there have been few attempts to integrate them theoretically within psychoanalytic, phenomenological or socio-cultural frameworks.

This is nowhere more evident than in theatrical discourse. My own reading thus attempts to redress this oversight by taking all these various frameworks into account and by working from within them in order to illustrate how the existing theoretical, historical and psychoanalytic models of vision and trauma can be integrated in order to augment our understanding of trauma through vision. At the same time, these models can allow us to gain insight into traumatic performances and the way we view and perform the traumatized body both on and off the stage. In many respects, my work is heavily indebted to theatre theory, the precepts of Ancient Greek tragedy – with its stress on notions such as anagnorisis and catharsis – as well as phenomenological and psychoanalytical discourses.

In all my chapters I have endeavoured to show how trauma, vision and theatre are interlinked. By pressuring those links I have also strived to bring out how the stage can serve as a text or textual space in its own right and also how it can function as a body or body politic upon which various visuo-spatial and traumatic themes are inscribed and (re)enacted. By anachronistically mapping the concerns and issues of Ancient Greek and Elizabethan theatre onto more modern renditions of theatrical discourse, I have also attempted to trace a non-teleological model of trauma which transcends space and time and to provide an extended analysis, through various performances, of how trauma and theatre come together in the optical field.

In the same way as Jeffrey Mehlman generally superimposes Freud's texts and plays them off against each other in order to effect a greater understanding of the psychoanalytic concepts which Freud engages with, this work superimposes plays and

performances which, albeit so culturally and temporally divorced from each other, can be read against each other in order to ‘unearth’ their similarities and multiple semantic layers. In effect, my reading envisions these plays and performances as palimpsests *a priori* with multiple layers of encoded meanings (I choose the word ‘palimpsest’ deliberately since it encapsulates the notion of layering, semanticity and legible traces, the Ancient Egyptian papyri being a good and prime example). In my view, the plays and performances exhibit the ‘trace’ of trauma in the same way as Derrida locates a trace in language.

As Derrida notes in *Writing and Difference*, a ‘trace is not a presence but is rather the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself. The trace has, properly speaking, no place, for effacement belongs to the very structure of the trace’ (403). In the same way, trauma is unlocatable and constantly refers beyond itself. Yet it is its very effacement which allows it to be read, in the same way as metaphysical texts are made legible through the trace and its effacement. Trauma is never simply self-referential. It posits itself as both intrapsychical and social at once, as both a private, internal affair and a public, shared experience. It curiously wavers between the two in a neither/nor equation, in the same way as the very term itself encapsulates in its very definition both a physical and psychological wounding (a point made by Freud).

If Greek tragedy can speak to our present state it is precisely because Oedipus’s wounding is both physical (from the very moment of his birth when he was pierced on his feet to the final, climactic moment where he gouges out his own eyes), and psychological, a private and a social wound at the same time. This is why Rachel Bowlby’s rereading of the Oedipal tragedy in *Freudian Mythologies* is significant to the extent that it renegotiates the question of identity in Greek tragedy in its interplay

between private and intersocial levels and the ways in which this interplay speaks to our modern condition. This is nowhere more evident, perhaps, than in live performance art, where bodily-based performances such as those of Orlan and Franko B become both private ordeals and shared communal events.

If we are to believe Freud's interpretation of Oedipus's struggles, then the trauma is not a private one at all but has very real, social implications. We have already seen how Oedipus must bear the burden of his trauma by ridding the city of its miasma. Girard reminds us that he must become the scapegoat or *pharmakos* in order to purge the city and its inhabitants from defilement. There is a kind of mimetic violence implied here which, paradoxically, serves both virulent and regenerative ends. Through ritual, sacrifice and the repetition of violence a *greater* violence can be warded off and cordoned from the city-state. In short, ritual, myth and sacrifice can ward off trauma and violence. This is later displaced onto the theatrical stage such that the repetition of traumatic events on stage serves the exact same function as ritual and sacrifice in warding off violence. The actors and the audience are able to see (or, in many cases, envision in their mind's eye) the violent reenactment of various traumatic events, and this spectacle serves a generative and cathartic function in purging their emotional tensions.

In the more modern performances of trauma by Franko B and Orlan, there is a very real impression of these artists sacrificing their bodies in a ritualistic way in order to maintain their survival. While clearly both artists are doing different things with their bodies, their end goal seems to be to ward off death through self-martyrdom. Certainly the theme of religious sacrifice runs strongly throughout the work of both performance artists, as well as the notion of rebirth or reincarnation after strenuous and challenging physical ordeals.

While many theorists and critics who have written about these performances are preoccupied with the question of catharsis and to what extent it is achieved through performance, my interest lies in leaving the interpretative field open rather than sealing it, as well as in documenting the potential affective force of the performances themselves. In terms of audience response, and by working within such a fluid and open schema of interpretation, the achievement of catharsis becomes irrelevant in relation to the fluidity of meaning(s) and enigmatic signifiers surrounding the performative and bodily acts. Indeed, meaning becomes, or rather it *is*, as fluid as Franko B's blood play.

As Habermas points out, our observations, perceptual experiences and habits of inference always engender knowledge or truth within the realm of semiotic representation. He points out in *Knowledge and Human Interests* that it is only when knowledge is based on ideas that it 'can truly orient action.' The very word 'theory' has religious roots. 'The *theoros* was the representative sent by Greek cities to public celebrations. Through *theoria*, that is through looking on, he abandoned himself to the sacred events. In philosophical language, *theoria* was transferred to contemplation of the cosmos' (301). With Derrida, who invokes Nietzsche and the end of humanism, the interpretative and semantic fields of contextual discourse shift *via* recourse to a theory of deconstruction which accommodates a ceaseless multiplication of significations.

Derrida emphasizes that reading a text depends on the historical and social contexts in which language is used. But such contexts are never fixed; they are always changeable and changing. There can be an infinite or iterable number of contexts for any given utterance, which makes meaning fluid and undecidable rather than guaranteed. Since contexts are multiple, fluid and heterogenous, it becomes

impossible to fix on a single, definitive meaning for any given text. Indeed, any attempts to make sense of a specified text presuppose an act of interpretation, and interpretation already presupposes an endless multiplication of significations. The chain of signification never ends. From a similar angle, and in the same way as Derrida views the reading of texts, all performances themselves can be seen as encompassing a ceaseless multiplication of significations depending upon how the textual body in performance is viewed, read and subsequently interpreted.

The aporia resides in the conflict between the decodable and rule-oriented grammatical and social structures in which the body is placed and their rhetorical, even subversive, potential that opens up vertiginous possibilities of reference. The readings are inexhaustible. We have already seen how Franko B's body can be made to signify in various different ways: it is a marker of the abject, an instance of the body-image-machine complex, an elegiac body of sorrows, the body of a white man, the body of a gay man, even a signifier of the absence of blackness. At the same time as all these assumptions stand, they are also potential interpretations in an endless process of construal. Franko B's body stands in referentially for all these interpretations (or maybe just several of them?) at the same time as it stands in for neither of them.

The fully articulated meaning of Franko B's performances inheres in the habits of interpretation of his spectators, which in turn are governed by their interpretative capacities and dispositions within their socio-historical environment, as well as by other sociological factors such as gender, class, sexuality, religion and ethnicity. Since the performance theorists who are writing about Franko B's work are primarily white and middle-class, their reading is inflected by their social position.

In addition to this, gender and sexual identity are fluid and do not always neatly fall into clear-cut binaries or essentialist categories (man/woman, straight/gay). The performance of gender will vary according to context and spatio-temporal considerations. Gender roles are enacted according to situational contexts; the role is not a definitive and fixed one but a situated one which is both socially constructed and fluidly (re)constituted as the social circumstances arise. Before embarking upon theoretical speculations in relation to live performance art, it is important to actively engage with what people define or 'know' as 'reality' in their everyday, non-theoretical or even pre-theoretical lives (Berger and Luckmann 15). The sociology of knowledge is not a pre-given entity but based on human activities and processes.

Certainly one way of looking at Franko B's performances is to view them as a 'punctur[ing] and tear[ing] open [of] theoretical skins' only to have them 'disappear again' (Harradine 70). Franko B's work is heavily predicated on skin, as well as notions of inner/outer surfaces or 'second' skins. The trauma or *punctum* of his performances lies in witnessing the ambiguous dithering or vacillation – even collapse – between public and private boundaries, what Laplanche has cited as 'a kind of *internal-external* instance' (*Life & Death in Psychoanalysis* 42). Franko B's wounds are made traumatic because they lie on the cusp between the private and the public, perception and representation, neither completely one nor the other – and yet both simultaneously. Franko B's performances are both traumatic, private ordeals and shared, communal experiences of trauma, the trauma of bearing witness to another's trauma. It is this mimetic logic which ultimately gives strength to Franko B's performances. The constant collapse between inner and outer worlds can often breed Derridean 'monsters' or monstrous anxieties, some of which refuse to be neatly categorized, normalized or assimilated within mainstream culture.

As one witnesses Franko B's cut and instrumented body dripping and bleeding to death on a white canvas, or Orlan's 'cosmetic' and performance surgeries, in which she willingly undergoes facial procedures involving the jabbing of needles and the mutilative slashing of skin, one wonders to what extent such performances can be classified as 'aesthetic' works of art or simply as deranged and perverse practices of a twisted mind. Even though many spectators are baying for Franko B's blood, there are others – such as Doyle – who weep for his bleeding and elegiac body. And there are others still who cannot 'stomach' or rationalize his bloody performances.

Without clearly demarcating these boundaries between art and sickness, between 'aesthetic' mutilation as grace or perversion, this work has sought to encompass all possible readings without privileging or singling out a specific one, and, further to this, has attempted to engage with several theoretical models which strive to elucidate how the performing body has been viewed, and can be viewed, on stage. Quite clearly, the process of viewing and interpreting the performing body is a complex one, and even more especially so when this performing body visibly stands before us and bleeds. (Indeed, Franko B has often been identified as being 'the bleeding body'.) Yet, as Favazza suggests, 'it is easy to forget that dripping blood may accompany birth as well as death' (322).

Franko B and other live performance artists use their body as a kind of stage on which to perform ritualized bodily practices. These practices are always already inflected and shaped by political concerns. They are political not only because Franko B's body can be read as a socio-political text onto which are grafted genderized and sexualized identities or identifications, but also because they involve spectators from a wide range of different backgrounds in a kind of communal and shared event. In the same way as Athenian audiences gathered in the theatre of the great political and

democratic capital in order to engage in a kind of ‘participatory collective spectatorship’ (Goldhill 19), a spectatorship which effectively marked their role of citizenship within the city-state and body politic, spectators gather around Franko B’s bleeding and wounded body to share – in a kind of symbolic and bloody Eucharist – in his performance of the violent and ritualized wounding of the social fabric when and *as* it attempts to shore up fixed humanist constructions of social identity.

As Seltzer forcefully reminds us, we live in a ‘wound culture’ which exhibits a constant ‘public fascination with [the spectacle of] torn and open bodies and torn and opened persons’ (1). This fascination is neither new nor uncommon. As far back as Roman times, the gladiators engaged in violent and civic displays, or rather contests, of physical manhood for the benefit of the public and the Emperor. The contests were strategically designed to serve as political tactics in that not only did they keep the plebeians under control but also demonstrated the might and strength of the Great Roman Empire.

Viewing is clearly a political act, as is going to the theatre, which is itself a ‘place for viewing’ (Goldhill 19). It is my contention that any act of looking is never neutral but always tinged, consciously or not, with social, political and even economic considerations. This is nowhere more evident than in the theatre, which serves as the place where the body and the body politic come together. It is my hope that this work, in its explicative analysis and theoretical exegesis of the dynamics of specific visual plays and performances, as well as of the associated links between theatre, vision, trauma and the body, is a small stepping-stone and testimony to the undeniable potential of theatre to widen and enrich our understanding of our interpretative and visual realms.

## NOTES

## Introduction

<sup>1</sup> I am specifically delimiting my investigation here to Western theories and interpretations of the gaze because of the great weight accorded to them in ontological and metaphysical discourse. Renée C. Hoogland points this out in her chapter entitled 'The Gaze of Inversion: The Lesbian as Visionary,' in which she refers to 'the central role of the specular metaphor in the discourse of Western epistemology' and 'within the system of Western metaphysics.' In *Vision in Context: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Sight*, ed. by Teresa Brennan and Martin Jay (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 157-67 (157). This is not to suggest of course that there are no other ways of seeing. Particularly in theatre, where sight is such an important factor, there are clearly a number of non-Western productions which may lay claim to different techniques of looking and interpretative, perceptual apparatuses as far as sight is concerned. I am reminded here of Antonin Artaud's descriptions of Oriental and Balinese theatre productions. In *The Theatre and Its Double*, trans. by Victor Corti (London & New York: Calder Publications, 1993), he draws a sharp distinction between the West and such forms of theatre, claiming that the latter 'has invented a language of gestures to be spatially developed' through 'a whole ferment of sight and sound imagery' (43-4).

<sup>2</sup> There is a near-frenzied obsession with the all-seeing eye and the ability to know through seeing. In Buddhism and Hinduism enlightenment is achieved through a 'third eye' which sees everything. I am also reminded here of Rousseau's constant obsession to see things more clearly. Cf. Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay "Nature" (1836): 'Standing on the bare ground [...] all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God.'

<sup>3</sup> That there is no God's-eye view of the world is clearly linked to what Martin Jay defines as an antiocularcentric discourse in the West which is in opposition to ocularcentrism and the heliotropic privileging of sight. This tradition can be traced as far back as Plato, who demonstrated the illusion and deceptiveness of sight in his famous example of the shadowed cave in *The Republic*. It finds ample echoes in Nietzsche's well-known assertion in *The Gay Science* (1882) that 'God is dead' – hence there can be no God's view – as well as in Bataille's slippery linkages between the eye, sun and other circular shapes in order to stress, through a kind of defilement which relegates them to ignobility, the deprivileging of the eye's hierarchical status. I shall turn to this antiocularcentric trend later on in my argument, together with the anxieties produced by scopophilia and the other's gaze.

<sup>4</sup> As Mary Ann Caws points out in *The Eye in the Text: Essays on Perception, Mannerist to Modern* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981) this was a question that Artaud takes up in his play *La Place de l'amour*, where the character Paolo Uccello struggles with the problem of seeing oneself see: 'to determine yourself, as if not being the one to determine, to look at your self with the eyes of your mind without it being those eyes looking. To retain the benefit of your personal judgment, all the while alienating the personality itself from that judgment. To see yourself and overlook your being yourself that you see' (88).

<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the orgasm of *jouissance* hinges as much on death as it does on loss; for one can very easily lose oneself in its throes, in that spasmic rush or engorgement of blood to the genitals which, at the critical moment, leads to separation and ejection of fluids from self. It is telling in this instance that the French identify orgasm with '*la petite mort*.'

<sup>6</sup> Lacan posits a masculine, phallic *jouissance* and one which is Other to it. Both are played off against each other through a complex economy of lack and desire set in motion by the phallus, the predominant signifier for Lacan. Since the phallus is desired by both sexes, it 'embod[ies] *jouissance* in the dialectic of desire,' a structural position constantly sought for (353). Along similar lines, Freud in his seminal essay 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (1920) also stipulates the dominance of the pleasure principle, which Lacan drew upon for his theory of *jouissance*.

<sup>7</sup> As Jill Dolan points out in *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1988): 'Women never assumed an active place in theatrical representation, which conspired from its beginnings to detach women as a gender class from their material base and to create them instead as a transcendent myth used to serve the male ideology cultural practices perpetuated' (96). Such a reductionist approach, however, seems too simplistic and absolute. I am hesitant to attribute all theatrical conventions as a 'conspiracy' to relegate women to an inferior or mythologized status. Rather, it is the prominence of male ideology which occludes or prevents a fuller understanding of either more gender-neutral representations or theatrical devices aimed specifically at female audiences.

It seems to me that Dolan is too imbricated in asserting a male-dominated patriarchy to see that there could be exceptions to the rule.

<sup>8</sup> While I am clearly aware that there are various types of feminism, I have grouped them all under one common denominator for matters of pure convenience. This is not to say that they all ultimately share the same goal or project. For an extended analysis of the various types, such as cultural and material feminism, see Dolan.

<sup>9</sup> *Timaeus*, 52b. Although Bianchi explains in her footnote that she is indebted to Desmond Lee's translation, it is interesting that she skips the cosmological aspects of Plato's narration in the translated section in which he assigns this chora, strictly speaking, neither to the earth nor sky: 'τὸ δὲ μήτ' ἐν γῆ μήτε που κατ' οὐρανὸν οὐδὲν εἶναι.'

<sup>10</sup> I say this space is 'almost prelinguistic' because I wish to avoid the pitfall many feminists make of criticizing Kristeva for positing a utopian or out-of-topic space outside culture or history. Although Judith Butler, for example, contends in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990) that the chora is confined 'to a site outside culture itself' (88), a rereading of Kristeva's *Revolution in Poetic Language* shows that, in terms of her theory of signification, the chora 'is not yet a position that represents something for someone' (26). I deliberately read the chora as extralinguistic – even 'paralinguistic' – rather than strictly prelinguistic. Cf. Maria Margaroni in her 'The Lost Foundation': Kristeva's Semiotic *Chora* and Its Ambiguous Legacy,' *Hypatia* 20.1 (Winter 2005), 78-98 (84): 'In this light, the *chora* should be perceived as neither a preverbal space nor as a timeless time before history. Its effect, as Kristeva has repeatedly pointed out, is *transverbal* (moving through and across *logos*) and *transhistorical* (alongside, opposite to and in the margins of history).' Quite clearly, this reading dynamically situates the chora *within* history at the same time as it constrains it by its contingency on socio-historical forces. That certain feminists should read Kristeva against the grain is baffling indeed.

<sup>11</sup> Of course plays and theatrical events can engage the spectators in other ways as well rather than just through sight. In his examination of contemporary French companies, Richard Webb comes to the following conclusion: 'Experiments which involve the spectator in the performance or which extend to him [*sic*] a creative role in the dramatic process must call into question our conventional understanding of theatre and artistic creation' (qtd. in Bennett 14).

<sup>12</sup> I am using the term 'performative' in a very specific way here in order to distinguish performativity from actual performance. As Elin Diamond stipulates in *Unmaking Mimesis* (London & New York: Routledge, 1997), 'Though "performativity" is not an "act" but a "reiteration" or "citation," why should we restrict its iterative sites to theory and to the theorist's acts of seeing?' (47). Diamond's formulation of performativity as a 'reiteration' rather than an act opens out the possibility of imagining performative acts or gestures as more than just embodied or repetitive events or even visual markers. They can be reconfigured and reimagined in different ways and along different trajectories or chains of signification. In the same way, although trauma can be seen as being a performative and repetitive event, its permutations allow for a plenitude of interpretative possibilities along the axis of representation. Trauma is both embodied in that it is materialized through the body – and hence felt – and performative in so far as it is enacted and re-enacted in performance, a (re)enactment which often has the paradoxical effect of erasing this body's materiality. I will take up these issues again in Chapter Five when I explore Orlan's radical, performative practices. Such practices are explored in order to bring out the interpretative quality of performance. Cf. the Introduction to *Performing the Body/Performing the Text*, ed. by Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson (London & New York: Routledge, 1999), where Jones and Stephenson point out that the collected chapters in the edition are committed 'to the dual project of exploring practices that enact the body or subject in a *performative* fashion (*Performing the Body*) in order to point to the act of interpretation itself as a kind of performance (*Performing the Text*),' (1).

<sup>13</sup> Written from within this theoretical milieu of 'reader-response theory' and strategies of reception, Jean E. Howard's *Shakespeare's Art of Orchestration* (1984) seems to be quite an attractive reading: 'I assume that in writing plays for performance Shakespeare was partly writing with an eye to the potential responses of the audience; that is, as he orchestrated the play, he was indirectly orchestrating the theatrical experience of the viewer' (qtd. in Bennett 14). While it is impossible to verify this, it is safe to assume that in later theatrical productions of Shakespeare's plays, directors would play with visual effects in order to create specific responses in their audiences, an argument to which I shall return.

<sup>14</sup> Another reading (which may seem paradoxical) is to assert that the power or potency of pain can be negated through repetition. I find J. B. Pontalis's formulation of psychic pain quite adept in relation to Orlan's work. As he points out in *Frontiers in Psychoanalysis: Between the Dream and Psychic Pain*,

trans. by Catherine Cullen and Philip Cullen (London: The Hogarth Press, 1981): 'Sometimes obvious, noisy, repeated suffering serves as a screen for pain. Is not the function of some suffering to *evacuate* psychic pain, and I am thinking in particular of sado-masochistic suffering in which the subject is his own producer and master of his own scenario. To suffer a lot, at the necessary time and for the necessary duration in order not to suffer too much, and for ever?' (203-4). This would lend some credibility to Orlan's asserted refutations of pain had it not been for her adamant refusal to associate her performances with masochistic practices.

<sup>15</sup> Postmodernist theory is certainly not without its opponents. Judith Butler finds the term 'postmodern' to be vague and reductionistic, if not meaningless. Her theory of performativity, however, has been very popular with many postmodern feminists in the 1990s. In *Gender Trouble* she points to how gender is a social construction which is performatively produced.

<sup>16</sup> Cathryn Vasseleu argues of course that Irigaray should not be criticized for her pronouncements against visual supremacy in a male-dominated economy since her theorizations also extend to an 'assessment of the workings of heliocentrism' in relation to 'Derrida's naming of woman as writing or *différance*' (129-30) and her eroticization of the Platonic sun's light, where the sun is construed by Irigaray as being phallic. While I am sensitive to Vasseleu's claims, and while it is beyond the scope of this paper to fully engage in Irigaray's specular analyses and her arguments about the regrettable complicity of photology and phallogentrism in Western philosophy and its metaphysics of presence, which serves to reduce women to the other of the one or sameness of the one, it is true that her recourse to a somewhat Diderotian move of asserting the value of touch in her theorization of women's autoeroticism through 'vaginal lips that touch' is an attempt to posit a tactile discourse for women which clearly moves away from visual concerns and somewhat deprivileges them.

<sup>17</sup> In an interesting self-help book on how to heal past traumas entitled *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1997) Peter A. Levine uses the Medusan myth to provide a somewhat optimistic reading in relation to how trauma resolution can be achieved: 'If we attempt to confront trauma head on, it will continue to do what it has already done – immobilize us in fear. Before Perseus set out to conquer Medusa, he was warned by Athena not to look directly at the Gorgon. Heeding the goddess's wisdom, he used his shield to reflect Medusa's image; by doing so, he was able to cut off her head. Likewise, the solution to vanquishing trauma comes not through confronting it directly, but by working with its reflection, mirrored in our instinctual responses' (65).

<sup>18</sup> Clearly I am not suggesting that the audience is infantilized in this process. It is only to illustrate that suggestive and often fruitful links can be made between psychoanalysis and audience reception. There has been a growing fascination with teasing out and pressuring these links in the film industry. The famous British film director and producer Sir Alfred Hitchcock was well-versed in Freudian theory and used it to his advantage in manipulating his audiences. In 'Death Drive's Joy Ride: David Cronenberg's *Crash*,' *Other Voices: The (e)Journal of Cultural Criticism* 1:3 (January 1999), Manuel Cambor describes the effects of David Cronenberg's film *Crash* on its audiences in specifically psychoanalytic terms. If, as Manuel Cambor illustrates, sexuality for Lacan is 'the reality of the unconscious,' then 'the eroticized emission and reception of a signifier [...] effectively establishes an area of contact with the unconscious.' The erotic signifier is both transmitted and received, always reaching its 'destination,' which is the unconscious. Cambor's analysis is interesting because it demonstrates how the characters' signifying wounds within the film could become traumatic if they are visually perceived and 'received' by the spectator as erotic, if they succeed, that is, in reaching their destination and broaching the spectator's unconscious. Yet while the spectators of the film may be in a potentially dangerous situation, in so far as they recognize these wounds as highly erotic and painful markers which can activate their own unconscious fantasies and desires, this is not to say that spectators of theatrical performances are not confronted with the same dilemma. The viewing medium may be different but the psychoanalytical framework still holds.

<sup>19</sup> As Seltzer points out, this public fascination with wounds and violence, which he associates primarily with America, has led to 'a radical mutation and relocation of the public sphere, now centered on the shared and reproducible spectacles of pathological violence' (254). Yet, while there has been a growing 'pathological violence' in the public sphere, this is not to say that public displays of violence did not exist before, only that perhaps there has been an increasing assimilation or pathologization of the violence itself. Note, for instance, Michel Foucault's fascinating documentation in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin Books, 1991) of how in the early modern period pillory, scaffolding, and other forms of torture or execution had to be public events in order for the juridical system to work: 'And, from the point of view of the law that imposes it, public torture and execution must be spectacular, it must be seen by all almost as its triumph' (34). While Foucault is obviously tracing a very different era, in which power was

centralized around the sovereign state, this does not necessarily imply that the spectators constantly gathering around the scaffold to witness the spectacles of violent torture are in any way fundamentally different from the spectators who gather today around other violent spectacles. Who is to say, for instance, that the former did not find the public execution of the condemned man as fascinating? As liable to trigger within them a violent desire to simulate the torture in some form or other? Whatever the case, it must not be forgotten that in both instances the violence becomes a communal event in the (pathological) public sphere. All this is opposed, of course, to Jürgen Habermas's notions of the public sphere as freely democratic and 'the alternative to the sphere of public violence (the domain of the state and of the police)' (Seltzer 253).

<sup>20</sup> This is of course not to debase the invaluable work of many feminist writers who have also undertaken the same project. Although I will often explore how they have grappled with the issue of assigning agency to the female other, I would like to note from the outset that my primary concern is with Laplanche's formulation of an enigmatic signifier which functions as an extra-linguistic and visual sign or hieroglyph. Although sadly Laplanche's work has often been overlooked by many writers, I feel that his theory of the signifier is important because it not only brings the female other to the fore but also ushers in and explains, or rather gives primacy to, the nexus between the primary caretaker (who is usually the mother) and the child. As the psychiatrist Felicity de Zulueta has demonstrated by recourse to the work of clinicians, zoologists and anthropologists in her *From Pain to Violence: The Traumatic Roots of Destructiveness*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2006), 'the disruption and abuse of the primary attachment relationships can have devastating effects on the self and engender considerable violence, a violence that is usually turned against the self.' Thus, the greater the psychobiological trauma in childhood the greater the violence in later life. Although de Zulueta's links between child abuse, human destructiveness and terrorism need further substantiation, it is worth considering her claim that studies of primates and humans have 'show[n] that the most effective transmission of cultural values occurs through manipulation of the infant-caregiver attachment system' (7).

<sup>21</sup> Paradoxically, the absence of women on the stage is also seen as undermining this very phantasy. As Stephen Orgel notes in *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), several antitheatrical writers are afraid that theatre will lead to men's effeminization and arouse homoerotic feelings or sexual licentiousness in its spectators. 'For such writers, the very fact that women are prohibited from the stage reveals the true etiology of theatre: what the spectator is "really" attracted to in plays is an undifferentiated sexuality, a sexuality that does not distinguish men from women and reduces men to women – the deepest fear in antitheatrical tracts [...] is the fear of a universal effeminization' (29). Such antitheatrical sentiments, of course, can be traced as far back as Plato.

## CHAPTER ONE

<sup>1</sup> In Immanuel Kant's existentialist metaphysics the rupture which clearly exists between perception and representation, the perceived object as it is conceived in the mind and the way it is physically represented, can be bridged by recourse to reason and experience. 'Our representation of things, as they are given, does not conform to these things as they are in themselves, but [that] these objects as appearances conform to our mode of representation,' in Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. Qtd. in Marina Warner, *The Inner Eye: Art Beyond the Visible* (London: National Touring Exhibitions, 1996-7), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'Is Sensation a Language?', in *Writing and Psychoanalysis: A Reader*, ed. by John Lechte (London & New York: Arnold, 1996), p. 199.

<sup>3</sup> I use the term 'semantic function' here deliberately to depict the body's ability to function as a signifier or sign which is involved in and mediated through ontological discourse. The term is employed by Paul Youngquist in 'Ballard's Crash-Body,' *Postmodern Culture* 11.1 (September 2000). For an interpretation of how language functions as an ontological system, see Lacan, who points out in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London & New York: Routledge, 2003) that language is not an abstraction but a material body: 'language is not immaterial. It is a subtle body, but body it is' (95).

<sup>4</sup> This is certainly not to suggest that the auditory and tactile sense-perceptions which precede sight are of any less importance to the schematic development of the child's perceptual apparatus. While touch

and hearing are of course significant, what primarily concerns me is the visual apparatus and its capacity to perceive material objects in the existential world.

<sup>5</sup> Most of Plato's work centres, in fact, on the question of the Idea. His Theory of Forms is posited at large in *The Republic* and *Symposium*, seminal works which, together with those of Aristotle, helped shape much of Western thinking and philosophy.

<sup>6</sup> In a similar vein, and in a line of thinking which seems to run parallel to that of Plato's, John Berger et al. note in *Ways of Seeing* that 'an image is a sight which has been recreated or reproduced. It is an appearance, or a set of appearances, which has been detached from the place and time in which it first made its appearance and preserved – for a few moments or a few centuries' (9-10).

<sup>7</sup> The Neoplatonist alchemist Robert Fludd captures this idea by way of a diagram, in which an adult's mental consciousness is seen as a cinematic screen onto which visual images are projected. In Marina Warner, *The Inner Eye: Art Beyond the Visible*, p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> Of course this notion that knowledge is founded on sight is challenged by plays such as Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, a play which I shall explore in great depth in the second chapter.

<sup>9</sup> Although my analysis is at present concerned with images that are rooted in a concrete materiality, it is clearly important to bear in mind that there are those images, more aptly defined as abstract symbols, which do not neatly conform to this mode of representation since they are always already, in and of themselves, disembodied. I shall return to the question of metaphoricity later on in my argument.

<sup>10</sup> Bataille himself served in the army. In 'W.C. Preface to *Story of the Eye*' he gives an account of how his abandoned and mad father died in 1915 'in a bombarded town, a few miles from the German lines.' It is interesting to note that in referring to his father Bataille compares himself to Oedipus: 'My father having conceived me when blind (absolutely blind), I cannot tear out my eyes like Oedipus. Like Oedipus, I solved the riddle: no one divined it more deeply than I' (77). Although beyond the scope of my analysis, it seems that this preface may provide fertile ground for psychoanalytic explorations into Bataille's obsession with sight.

<sup>11</sup> For different readings of eye enucleation see Armando Favazza's *Bodies Under Siege: Self-mutilation and Body Modification in Culture and Psychiatry*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), where he links it to self-mutilators' investment in religious symbolism, as well as Jean-Joseph Goux, who claims in *Oedipus, Philosopher* (California: Stanford University Press, 1993): 'Gouging out an eye, for example, does not symbolize castration; it is a different way of symbolizing the sacrificial severing that emphasizes not its sexual meaning but its relation to knowledge, to "light."' Although Goux sees Oedipus as being a hero, thus lending him a subjectivity which Sophocles disallows, his reading is interesting to the extent that it opens up the interpretative field of signification, what Goux calls a 'nuanced wealth of meanings' (44).

<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, Phelan associates this hole with the vagina and suggests that the eye itself 'can be slit open like a dilating vagina' (39). What is more, this way of looking at the eye does not preclude the more captivating possibility of envisioning it as a 'slit in the male body.' (I am reminded here of Bataille's linkage of the eye to a solar anus.) Thus Phelan sees the penetrating, male gaze in high art and pornography as 'contingent upon the unmarked possibility of men's penetration of the bodies of men' (40). In *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* (London & New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>13</sup> Here is the full quote: 'As Griselda Pollock says, "Neither veiled as enigma and mysterious other, nor punished by our foolish desire to 'assimilate' to the figures of power, we have to return a steady and resilient look at our culture. The game is not to strip away the veil and expose the truth – it is to know what masks we wear, to define the texts we perform and to accept the necessity for critical knowledge as the condition for new pleasures, a 'new language of desire'" (199).

<sup>14</sup> I use the term 'dynamic' here to define the Laplanchean model specifically because the very notions of seeing and sight, which function as non-verbal signifiers, are tied in with the concept of vision as a dynamic process which bonds both the self and the other. As Berger et al. point out in *Ways of Seeing*, 'our vision is continually active, continually moving, continually holding things in a circle around itself, constituting what is present to us as we are.' Furthermore, this process is a dialectic one and what Berger et al. define as 'the reciprocal nature of vision' (9). That the primary caretaker in Laplanche's model should see her child in a specific way is an important determinant which will govern her treatment of it and behaviour towards it. This in turn will affect her non-verbal (and verbal) cues. Additionally, the child will pick up on certain of these non-verbal cues, however subtle, which the primary caretaker emanates and attempt to translate them into a coherent and unified synthesis. Incidentally, an interesting reading which sees the suckling child as more actively involved in the process of breastfeeding can be found in Christopher Badcock's *Oedipus in Evolution: A New Theory of Sex* (Oxford & Massachusetts: 1990). There Badcock stipulates that the child, antagonistic of potential rivals for mother's milk, is perceptive enough to know intuitively that the more it breastfeeds

the longer it stalls the mother's ability to conceive. Additionally, the child interrupts its parents' love-making at night with this express intention in mind: 'Quite apart from its undoubted significance for oral behaviour, night-time waking at a later age may perhaps relate to the infant's need to monitor its parents' sexual activities and perhaps to frustrate them whenever possible by crying, defecating and urinating, or even by just being seen to be awake' (92). While this theory is debatable in so far as it accords less primacy to the child's basic needs, it remains an interesting theory nevertheless.

<sup>15</sup> Indeed, this becomes the whole point of analysis, during which 'the whole movement of symbolisation consists in adding new signifiers with the purpose of displacing, transposing, and thus binding the most traumatic signifiers' (130). For a quick overview of Laplanche's more recent developments on this process of binding or unbinding of traumatic enigmatic signifiers see John Fletcher's article entitled 'The Scenography of Trauma: a 'Copernican' reading of Sophocles' Oedipus the King,' in *Textual Practice* 21.1 (2007), pp. 17-41.

<sup>16</sup> Borch-Jacobsen, qtd. in Maud Ellmann's 'Introduction,' in *Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism* (London & New York: Longman, 1994), p.14. Cf. Jerry Flieger, qtd. in 'Introduction' to *Psychoanalytic Criticism: A Reader*, ed. by Sue Vice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), pp. 12-3: 'Every human subject lays claim to his or her humanity by a *textual* process [...] a speaking or writing of desire *deflected* from the original short-circuit of the incestuous family foyer and diverted to the larger audience beyond.'

<sup>17</sup> As Rebecca Schneider points out in *The Explicit Body in Performance* (London & New York: Routledge, 1997), the object of desire can never be attained. The viewer or spectator 'does not "get" what he desires – he [*sic*] is destined to spend himself unseen, un(re)marked by the blinded object of his gaze, to try and try again, ritually stabbing at his own eyes like Oedipus' (70). Cf. Anne Ubersfeld's description of desire as being marked by limitations of pleasure and loss, in Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London & New York: Routledge, 1997): 'The limits of pleasure are marked by desire, 'desire as lack.' Thus the spectator or viewer 'cannot arrest or touch the object of desire. Indeed, desire moves from object to object and should it stop and fix on a particular object, then the role of spectator is relinquished, the theatrical experience denied' (73).

<sup>18</sup> Rosenberg explicitly links trauma with assimilation and states that trauma is to be located precisely at that definitive moment where assimilation fails. 'And experience is the crux; the failure of experience to inhere assimilation is precisely what trauma is' (31).

<sup>19</sup> For a critique of this tendency in psychoanalysis see Claire Stocks' article 'Trauma Theory and the Singular Self: Rethinking Extreme Experiences in the Light of Cross-cultural Identity,' in *Textual Practice* 21.1 (2007), pp. 71-92. There Stocks argues that psychoanalysis falsely predicates its assumptions on Western notions of identity as being coherent and whole. Thus 'the shared emphasis on the reintegration of a consciousness fragmented by an unassimilable event assumes the pre-existence of a state of perceived psychic unity that 'healing' aims to restore' (74).

<sup>20</sup> The process whereby positive or negative feelings that had previously been invested in the parents are now transferred onto the therapist is called transference. As Elizabeth Wright succinctly points out in her definition of transference in *Psychoanalytic Criticism: Theory in Practice* (London & New York: Methuen, 1984), it 'is a mode of investing persons and objects with positive and negative qualities, according to our early memories of significant experience of familial figures and the expectations founded thereon' (15).

<sup>21</sup> This is Freud's notion of *Nachträglichkeit* (deferred action). Arguably, in the same way as a child may fail to assimilate the enigmatic signifiers of a primal scene – which functions in itself as a scenographic performance – a spectator too may fail to assimilate the enigmatic signs of an actor. The complete process of working through these enigmatic, visual signs only occurs belatedly – that is, *after* the performance.

## CHAPTER TWO

<sup>1</sup> Cynthia Chase in 'Oedipal Textuality: Reading Freud's Reading of *Oedipus*,' makes the important observation that the English translation does not tally with the German one: 'The original German text refers to an inner 'voice which is ready,' not to 'something which makes' it ready, to perform the act of recognition.' In Maud Ellmann, *Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism*, p. 60. Obviously the German translation would suggest a much greater willingness on the part of subjective consciousness to recognize such Oedipal desires than the English one, which seems to imply that these desires are literally forced upon us in such a way that we have no recourse but to recognize them.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Cynthia Chase in 'Oedipal Textuality': 'Sophocles' play portrays Oedipus as the one person in history *without* an Oedipus complex in the conventional sense: he has murdered his father and married his mother in an appreciation of expediency rather than in satisfaction of a desire,' (62).

<sup>3</sup> Foreclosing the other/mother obviously has high stakes for feminism as well. Foreclosure not only refuses to take account of the mother's desire but also leads to her metaphorical death. In *On Matricide: Myth, Psychoanalysis, and the Law of the Mother* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), Amber Jacobs provides an interesting reading of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* by claiming that Clytemnestra is not the only mother who is murdered, even though this is overlooked by Freud and Irigaray. 'Metis, Athena's mother, haunts the *Oresteia* as the matricide that is hidden and unspoken' (60). She shows how, starting from this founding myth where Zeus raped and then swallowed Metis whole, the mother is often excluded from discourse. For my purposes, I would like to draw attention to Irigaray's identification of the *Oresteia* with *Oedipus Rex* and how she uses the former play 'to intervene into the logic of oedipal discourse' (Jacobs 100). Irigaray contends that Oedipus has already 'killed' Jocasta before her literal suicide: 'Hasn't the mother already been torn to pieces by Oedipus's hatred by the time she is cut up into stages, with each part of her body having to be cathected and then decathected as he grows up?' (qtd. in Jacobs 100).

<sup>4</sup> I am using the term 'introjection' very specifically here. Abraham and Torok explain that the term is often confused and cite the psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi who invented the term. Going back to Ferenczi's formulation, then, introjection is 'an extension to the external world of the original autoerotic interests, by including its objects in the ego' (qtd. in Abraham and Torok 112). What Oedipus has failed to do is to include the object in his ego and thus extend and broaden it.

<sup>5</sup> It is not unworthy to note here that the term *hamartia* would have been understood somewhat differently in Sophocles' time. To my knowledge, the term is deployed by Aristotle in *Poetics* to denote some tragic error on the part of the hero which inevitably leads to his downfall. E. R. Dodds, in his 'On Misunderstanding the *Oedipus Rex*,' *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Oedipus Rex*, ed. by Michael J. O'Brien (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968) notes how 'in ordinary usage [the term] is sometimes applied to false moral judgements, sometimes to purely intellectual error – the average Greek did not make our sharp distinction between the two,' pp. 18-9.

<sup>6</sup> This linkage of vision to sin resonates, of course, with religious undertones. One is reminded of the Biblical injunction in the New Testament where Christ asserts that if the eye causes you to sin, you should pluck it out. The verse of Matthew 18:7-9, of which I shall quote a part, provides a rule of conduct that is an interesting parallel to Oedipus's deed: 'What terrible things will come on the world through scandal! [...] If your eye is your downfall, gouge it out and cast it from you! Better to enter life with one eye than be thrown with both into Gehenna.'

<sup>7</sup> Although it is crucial that this tragic play forms part of a Greek oral tradition, it has been handed down to us, with all its controversial emendations and fragments, as a literary text. However, I should like to stress once more that while I am sensitive to its literary dimension, I am more interested in examining Oedipus as an actor for the most part rather than a patient. This is something that has also been taken up by Olga Taxidou in her chapter on Oedipus in *Tragedy, Modernity and Mourning* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004). See Chapter 2, 'Oedipus/Anti-Oedipus: The Philosopher, the Actor and the Patient.'

<sup>8</sup> 'Repetition for Itself,' in *Writing and Psychoanalysis*, pp. 19-40 (29): 'Repetition is constituted only with and through the *disguises* which affect the terms and relations of the real series, but it is so because it depends upon the virtual object as an immanent instance which operates above all by *displacement*.'

<sup>9</sup> As the eminent physician/philosopher Paracelsus observed roughly five hundred years ago in a classic formulation: 'He who enters the Kingdom of God *must* first enter his mother and die' (emphasis mine). Qtd. in Iona Miller, 'Demeter/Persephone: Return to the Womb,' *Psychogenesis II: Chaosophy 2000, Imagination: The Voice of Creativity*. Setting aside the religious resonances, Paracelsus's evocation of death as a fundamental biological necessity, rooted as it is in a simplistic theory of origins – 'we die where once we began' – curiously adumbrates Freud's theories in his seminal essay 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' some four hundred years later.

<sup>10</sup> Incidentally, that Oedipus is punished for a crime which Laius has committed in the past is referred to in the literature, although this seems to slip Goux's memory. At the same time, Oedipus's empiricism, sinful as it is, bears resemblances to that of Eve's, the first woman in the Bible who challenged God's authority. Lot's wife, who turned into a pillar of salt when she disobeyed God's command, is another example. Defiance of divine authority has often been represented in the literature as leading to disastrous consequences for the sinners. As Ellmann notes in her 'Introduction' Sophocles' play derives its power from the fact that it 'depends upon the *process* of discovery rather

than the crimes revealed; like a psychoanalysis, its terror lies in the interpretive activity itself, the sheer audacity of looking back into the past and rediscovering the violence of childhood. Thus it is curious that many myths revolve around the prohibition of the backward glance: Lot's wife turns into a pillar of salt when she looks back at her homeland left behind; Orpheus is permitted to conduct Eurydice out of the underworld only under the condition that he does not look back at her' (8-9). Thus Oedipus is punished for looking back into his past.

<sup>11</sup> As Christopher Booker notes in *The Seven Basic Plots: Why we tell stories* (London & New York: Continuum 2004), when faced with a man such as Oedipus some spectators may feel 'a long-repressed sense of guilt about their own lives.' He notes 'how, during a particularly powerful production of the play at Stratford-on-Avon in the 1950s, a good many people in the audience, as the Tragedy moved towards its climax, could evidently take no more and stole out of the theatre. Although these people had not literally killed their fathers and married their mothers, the more general sense of unease the play aroused in them became too much to bear' (520, footnote 2).

<sup>12</sup> See also Jean Laplanche's highly illuminating chapter 'Why the Death Drive?', in *Life & Death in Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Jeffrey Mehlman (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976; repr. 1985), pp. 103-126, where he invokes thermodynamic and graphic models to show the illogical discrepancy in Freud's algorithmic method of conflating two completely divergent principles: 'Thus, insofar as they are related within a single system to the same type of quantifiable energy, a zero principle and a constancy principle are irreducible to each other' (114).

<sup>13</sup> Thus there have been many productions of Sophocles' play. In *Myth and Tragedy* Vidal-Naquet describes Angelo Ingegneri's production in Vicenza in a Roman theatre in 1585, a production in which 'masks were deliberately excluded' although the director knew the instrumental role they played in Ancient Greek theatre (371) and also examines subsequent revivals and revisions of the play by French writers and dramatists such as Corneille and Voltaire. In *Modernism and Performance: Jarry to Brecht* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan 2007) Taxidou looks at a more modern staging of the play by Max Reinhardt at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, in 1912 (157).

## CHAPTER THREE

<sup>1</sup> As Freud notes in 'Some Character-Types Met with in Psychoanalytic Work' (*The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XIV, trans. by James Strachey, London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), the illness which follows after 'success' is intimately connected to the Oedipal complex and its concomitant feelings of guilt: 'Psycho-analytic work teaches that the forces of conscience which induce illness in consequence of success, instead of, as normally, in consequence of frustration, are closely connected with the Oedipus complex, the relation to father and mother – as perhaps, indeed, is our sense of guilt in general' (331). We presume that the success of Macbeth – and by extension Lady Macbeth who serves as his acolytic double – centres on Duncan's murder, the accomplishment of the dreadful deed of patricide/regicide. It is to be lamented that Freud does not explicitly make this connection in reference to the play. Since it is only a general observation made towards the end of the second section entitled 'Those Wrecked by Success,' the reader is left to fill in the blanks. Cf. G. Wilson Knight in 'Macbeth and the Metaphysic of Evil,' in *The Wheel of Fire: Essays in Interpretation of Shakespeare's Sombre Tragedies* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), pp. 154-74, who points out that the characters in the play 'lack will-power: that concept finds no place here. Neither we, nor they, know of what exactly they are guilty: yet they feel guilt' (167).

<sup>2</sup> This is in keeping, of course, with the Elizabethan belief in the Divine Right of Kings. As God's divine representative on Earth, the king is the epitome of royal and godly virtues. In his person are subsumed all the qualities and virtues such as mercy, courage, grace and bounty. In short, he represents greatness, and this is why Macbeth at first recoils with horror from his regicidal thoughts. As Macduff aptly says upon witnessing the bloody corpse of Duncan: 'Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope/ The Lord's anointed temple, and stole thence/ The life o' the building!' (II.III.49-51).

<sup>3</sup> There are myriad references to darkness in the play. For a detailed analysis see G. Wilson Knight's excellent chapter on the metaphysic of evil. As he points out: 'Darkness permeates the play. The greater part of the action takes place in the murk of night' (159). Additionally, that Shakespeare symbolically plays off light against dark is clear. As Caroline Spurgeon points out in 'Shakespeare's Imagery': 'Another constant idea in the play arises out of the symbolism that light stands for life, virtue, goodness; and darkness for evil and death' (166). In *Select Literary Criticism* section of

*Macbeth*, ed. by Bernard Groom (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954). All the textual quotations of the play were taken from this edition.

<sup>4</sup> Incidentally, a similar parallel can be found in *Julius Caesar*. Calpurnia's prophetic dream in Act II Scene 2 clearly illustrates what happens when kings die or – more specifically – when they are murdered by their own subjects. The graves will 'yield up' their dead, blood will stream over the Capitol, horses will neigh and lionesses will whelp, and ghosts will besiege the streets of Rome. The unnatural killing of a king will thus cause both nature and human nature to lose all balance and turn topsy-turvy.

<sup>5</sup> 'Extracts from Holinshed.' In *Appendix IV of Macbeth*. For more information on the stage history of the play and the use Shakespeare made of Holinshed's *Chronicles* see Michael Long's prefatory remarks in a section entitled 'The Stage History.'

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Vernant: 'Like birds that eat the flesh of birds, to borrow Aeschylus' expression, [Oedipus] has twice satiated himself with his own flesh, first by shedding the blood of his father and then by becoming united with the blood of his mother' (121-2).

<sup>7</sup> Although Girard seems to view *katharsis* as a phenomenon which produces similar results on both an individual and/or collective level, the process itself is clearly more complicated. As Andrew Ford notes in 'Katharsis: The Ancient Problem,' in *Performativity and Performance*, ed. with an Introduction by Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (New York & London: Routledge, 1995) the term actually allows Aristotle to make political and social distinctions among certain ranks of his audience. It is not simply that the theatre or Dionysia festivals in Ancient Athens in honour of the god Dionysus 'already inscribed significant social distinctions in its very seating of the audience' but also the fact that their response to *katharsis*, its very regulation, 'enable[d] Aristotle to sustain a nest of political distinctions within a single audience, between professional and amateur, free and unfree, noble and common' (122).

<sup>8</sup> Even when sacrificial violence takes place within a city's walls it is carefully regulated. In ancient times Athens always maintained a certain number of victims who functioned as *katharmata* or *pharmaka* for the *polis*. 'The city of Athens prudently kept on hand a number of unfortunate souls, whom it maintained at public expense, for appointed times as well as in certain emergencies. Whenever some calamity threatened – plague, famine, foreign invasion, or internal dissension – there was always a pharmakos at the disposal of the community' (Girard 94). For a brilliant cultural and theoretical analysis of the pharmakos and related rituals see Dennis D. Hughes, *Human Sacrifice in Ancient Greece* (London & New York: Routledge 1991). As Hughes points out, it was a common custom to expel pharmakoi in many Greek cities. 'In Ionia and Athens the rite was performed during the Apolline festival of the Thargelia' (139). Whilst certain sources claim that the pharmakoi were not simply driven out of a city's borders but often pelted with stones and killed when the city itself was afflicted with plague or famine, Hughes explains that these sources remain uncorroborated and that there is little evidence of cannibalism or human sacrifice in Ancient Greek culture. Having said this, he is willing to allow 'that human sacrifice flourished nowhere in ancient Greece so much as in Athens, upon the tragic stage' (189).

<sup>9</sup> See in particular Stephen Orgel, 'The Play of Conscience,' in *Performativity and Performance* for an in-depth explication of its poetic and medico-biological definitions.

<sup>10</sup> As Bennett points out, German theorists such as Husserl and Heidegger used a familiar term called the 'horizon of expectations' to refer to a reader's response to a particular text in light of dominant ideologies and the other texts already extant and in circulation. The same applies for a performance. The work of Hans Robert Jauss is particularly illuminating in this respect. For further explication, see the section entitled 'Reader-Response Theory' in Chapter 2 of Bennett's *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*.

<sup>11</sup> It is certainly not without reason that Plato condemned the theatre in his *Republic* since he felt that it stirred unruly passions in the audience.

<sup>12</sup> Note the implicit tautology of this assertion. Catharsis both divides the subject's body on an intrapersonal level and, through its very divisiveness, heals and regulates it back into social embodiment.

<sup>13</sup> It is not accidental, of course, that I begin the very first chapter by referring to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's work. I feel that a return to phenomenological roots can provide very fruitful ways of reading the body in the field of drama, ways which resist the anti-theatrical readings of semioticians and poststructuralists.

<sup>14</sup> See also p. 125. Derrida is referred to in both these sections. For his reading of hospitality see Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. by

George Collins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000). For his reading on friendship or *philia* refer to *The Politics of Friendship* (London and New York: Verso, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. by E. F. Watling (London: Penguin, 1974). These events are crucial, of course, to the dramatic action, but they take place off-stage or off-scene because they are obscene. In fact, the very word ‘obscenity’ has its roots in Greek etymology.

<sup>16</sup> I have somewhat oversimplified Smith’s theatre of ethics and morality. In a sense, Smith complicates the question of the spectatorial gaze by explaining that the spectator can see himself observing. Thus ‘subjectivity is precisely not positioned in the eye of the beholder, but, rather, in the exchanges that occur in the phantasmatic projection of what it might feel like to be constituted as a subject by looking on the onlookers of our selves.’ This question is complicated further when Smith brings up the notion of an ‘impartial spectator,’ an idealized condition or situation which we are constantly striving to attain in an ethically sound society (de Bolla 75-6).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. G. Wilson Knight who says of her, ‘she is a woman possessed – possessed of evil passion.’ He calls the ‘demon’ which takes hold of her ‘an evil *something* which masters her, mind and soul,’ ‘a nightmare *thing* of evil’ (167, emphasis mine). Knight’s is obviously a very particular reading and is inflected with a misogynist bent. That Marilyn French should follow suit and call Lady Macbeth ‘supernaturally evil’ (245) is worthy to note, if only because it attests – and regrettably so – to the tendency to dehumanize Lady Macbeth and undermine her incredible will-power and strength of character. As A. C. Bradley reminds us in *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1905): ‘However appalling she may be, she is sublime’ (368).

<sup>18</sup> Although it is of course important that Macbeth’s line will not continue, which is suggestive of Lady Macbeth’s incapacity to give him an heir, it is not her sterility or barrenness which is relevant. What interests me here is simply the fact that Macbeth has pointed out to her *potential* capacity to procreate and give birth. In my view, this at once sets her apart from him as an other. At the same time, the reference to the maternal breast is significant. I am reminded here of Aeschylus’ *The Libation Bearers* where Orestes confronts his mother Clytemnestra face-to-face and is ready to draw his sword to strike her down when she exposes her breast. As Jacobs points out, Orestes cannot act when he sees this breast. ‘Like Medusa, the monstrous all-powerful archaic mother figure, Clytemnestra’s breast is an image that freezes action.’ In contrast, Lady Macbeth invokes her breast in order to incite Macbeth to act. However, both breasts ‘threaten [the men] with impotence/castration’ and infantilize them (114). It is also interesting that by the end of the play Macbeth, like Medusa, is decapitated.

<sup>19</sup> I am reminded here of Tzvetan Todorov’s three-part narrative structure as well, in which the narrative opens with a form of equilibrium, which is then disrupted only for it to be later regained at the end through either a new one or the return of the opening one.

<sup>20</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of biorhythm and circadian cycles, as well as what occurs when these are disrupted, see David Healy, *Images of Trauma: From Hysteria to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (London & Boston: Faber and Faber, 1993).

## CHAPTER FOUR

<sup>1</sup> For a different interpretation of the spectre see Prema Prabhakar, ‘Invoking the Spectral Body: A Study of Potential Corporealities in the Work of Marina Abramovic and Francesca Woodman,’ *Excursions* 1.1 (June 2010), 91-101. As Prabhakar points out, the spectre is political, historical and also personal. She cites Derrida who ‘creates a specific genealogy of haunting, a specific idea of what type of body can claim, and has a responsibility to, history; it is a genealogy that is male, powerful, white and traditionally educated; this male ‘genealogy’ senses the spectre through the auditory and tries to speak to the spectre.’ Prabhakar takes note of this genealogy and proposes another one which is visual and ‘that creates through its body the visual depiction of its death and resurrection’ (92).

<sup>2</sup> For the Latin-American version of the play see Bernice Kliman and Rick Santos. *Latin American Shakespeares* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005), particularly pp. 103-4. In Orson Welles’s black production set in Haiti, the three witches are represented as being ‘voodoo priestesses.’ In Susan McCloskey, ‘Shakespeare, Orson Welles, and the ‘Voodoo’ Macbeth.’ *Shakespeare Quarterly* 36.4 (Jan 1985), pp. 406–416 (406).

<sup>3</sup> Clearly, not all feminist theory would privilege the subject’s point of view or even the female subject’s position. In *Histoire d’amour* (Paris: Editions Denoel, 1983), Julia Kristeva laments the fact that feminist theory is often ‘too existentialist’ (242). At the same time, the feminist claim that the personal is political partially suggests that subjectivity or subjective experience are not just structured

or governed by existing political structures and arrangements, but also structure those arrangements in turn. Feminist theory has sought to understand and explain how systemic or pervasive political and socio-cultural structures are enacted, re-enacted and reproduced through individualistic acts and practices.

## CHAPTER FIVE

<sup>1</sup> Davis provides a comprehensive overview of Orlan's body art, citing one of her lectures given in Amsterdam in 1995 where she projected images on screen of herself and her surgical wounds to an assembled audience.

<sup>2</sup> 'Two Essays: "Simulacra and Science Fiction" and "Ballard's Crash,"' *Science Fiction Studies* 18.3, (November 1991). Net web page: <http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/backissues/55/ baudrillard55art.htm> [accessed 11th July 2011].

<sup>3</sup> I use the term 'mediation' of the photographic image here rather deliberately. While for Baudrillard, for example, 'the photo is no more a medium than is the technology or the body – all are simultaneous in this universe where the anticipation of an event coincides with its reproduction, and even with its "real" occurrence"' (*Two Essays*), I read the photographic image as a medium which does not lack 'depth' of affectivity simply because it is reproducible, but has the ability, through its mediation with the body, to 'wound' or puncture it. As Roland Barthes points out in *Camera Lucida* (London: Vintage, 2000), there are certain photographs which have a *punctum*, a Latin word which 'refers to the notion of punctuation' and serves to designate the mark or wound made by this sharp 'element which rises from the scene [of the photograph], shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me' (26). Cf. Walter Benjamin in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1992), where the camera is seen as 'penetrating' into the unconscious, and drawing forth an 'unconscious optics' which would otherwise have remained invisible to the naked eye: 'Evidently a different nature opens itself to the camera than opens to the naked eye – if only because an unconsciously penetrated space is substituted for a space consciously explored by man' (230). It is, in fact, precisely Orlan's aim to 'punctuate' the other's consciousness, to effect a wounding or shock in the other, by her explicitly graphic visual images.

<sup>4</sup> While I am acutely aware of some of the limitations and critiques of phemonology as a perceptual and philosophical system, such as its presupposition according to Jill Dolan in *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* 'that there is a universal way of looking, that any perceivable object has a stable, universal essence that can be read the same way by any individual' (pp. 46-7), I am borrowing some of its concepts here because its positing of the individual as the centre of the cosmic universe seems to me to be especially relevant to Orlan's work and the perceptual field it engenders. It is by no means to imply that there is a universal way of reading Orlan's practices, only to suggest that her work firmly and squarely puts her at the centre of her own universe – and, it should be added, encompasses the spectator in that universe also.

<sup>5</sup> Taken from Jill Dolan, 'In Defense of the Discourse: Materialist Feminism, Postmodernism, Poststructuralism... and Theory,' in *A Sourcebook of Feminist Theatre and Performance*, ed. Carol Martin (London & New York: Routledge: 1996), p. 104.

<sup>6</sup> Vivian Sobchack, 'Baudrillard's Obscenity,' *Science Fiction Studies* 18: 3 (November 1991). Net web page: <http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/backissues/55/forum55.htm> [accessed 11th July 2011].

<sup>7</sup> I use the term 'inscription' deliberately here because of the not uncommon metaphorical status ascribed to the ontological body as text, as a site onto which multiple discourses and ideologies are re(inscribed) and re(interpreted). Karen Sanchez-Eppler, for example, in 'Bodily Bonds: The Intersecting Rhetorics of Feminism and Abolition,' *The New American Studies: Essays from Representations*, ed. Philip Fisher (California, University of California Press, 1991) reads the body as a text. Although her essay is primarily an exploration of the critical intersection of feminist and abolitionist practices in nineteenth-century slavocratic America, her focus on the human body of women and (female) slaves is particularly enlightening. She understands the body as 'attain[ing] the status of a text,' as being the site onto which the inscription of patriarchal readings takes place. For the woman to 'reclaim' her body she must 'invert patriarchal readings,' and find her voice by subversively refashioning the way her flesh is 'read' against her. 'For women the ability to speak was [and is] predicated upon the reinterpretation of [her] flesh,' which leads to her subsequent reinscription into subjective personhood (230). I find Eppler's formulation particularly intriguing, particularly in relation to Orlan's radical and shocking body play.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Imogen Ashby, 'The Mutant Woman: The Use and Abuse of the Female Body in Performance Art,' *Contemporary Theatre Review* 2000, 10.3 (Malaysia, OPA: 2000), pp. 39-51 (45): 'Interestingly, Orlan has been keen to underplay the pain involved in what she does and this is in stark contrast with other body artists who have used the pain inflicted to represent the oppression, or otherwise, that they experience.' Instead of using the politics of pain as a powerful force against which to reinscribe herself in patriarchal discourse, it is almost as if Orlan seeks to sidestep it or eliminate it from her field of vision by a radical subversion of its norms.

<sup>9</sup> Barbara Rose, 'Orlan: Is it Art? Orlan and the Transgressive Act,' *Art in America* 81.2 (Feb 1993), pp. 83-125. Net web page: <http://www.stanford.edu/class/history34q/readings/Orlan/Orlan2.html> [accessed 11th July 2011].

<sup>10</sup> Although there is a modern trend which seeks to rephrase self-mutilation by calling it self-harm, I feel that the latter term serves to deflect from the emotional resonance with which the former term is heavily loaded by effectually glossing it over. The term mutilation drives home with the full extent and force the recognition that there is a grotesque dimension to Orlan's practices, even though she herself has refuted such a claim.

<sup>11</sup> It is quite interesting to note in this respect that most self-cutters have been identified by Favazza et al as being primarily female. A study by Richard Rosenthal has also found that 'more than 60 percent of the self-cutting by women took place at the time of their menses' (qtd. in Favazza 269).

## CHAPTER SIX

<sup>1</sup> This is most probably a misprint. Cf. Patrick Campbell and Helen Spackman, 'With/out An-Aesthetic: The Terrible Beauty of Franko B,' in *The Drama Review (1998-)* 42.4 (Massachusetts, MIT Press: 1998), pp. 56-74 (60): 'Franko B. wants his audiences to confront the unbearable. His is no facile collusive pact with the spectators. His aim, he states, is to "show what is unbearable to look at – I want to make it bearable whether you like it or not, you're going to go away with that image in your memory"' (Franko B. 1995).

<sup>2</sup> I am using this notion of the performer/actor giving her or himself up to the audience in a very definitive sense here. In *From Acting to Performance: Essays in Modernism and Postmodernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) Philip Auslander refers to Jerzy Grotowski, for whom the performers were 'holy actors' who saw performance as being 'an act of self-sacrifice.' Auslander quotes Grotowski's basic principle: 'It is all a question of giving oneself' (22). The sacrificial elements of Franko B's performances, as he stands, Christ-like, with 'stigmata' in his forearms and strikes a beatific pose, seem to me to be an apt example of Grotowski's call for the performer's self-abnegation. As Grotowski illustrates: '[The actor] must learn to use his role as if it were a surgeon's scalpel, to dissect himself [...] The important thing is to use the role as a trampoline, an instrument with which to study what is hidden behind our everyday mask – the innermost core of our personality – in order to sacrifice it, expose it' (Grotowski qtd. in Auslander 23). Thus the performance is an act of self-exposure which 'dissects' the actor's personality. It must be noted, however, that whilst Grotowski is clearly speaking in metaphorical terms, Franko B's performance is a *literal* dissection, a visceral process of performative self-discovery. Additionally, while Grotowski's model creates a kind of leeway or aesthetic distance between the actor and the character whose role he or she embodies, Franko B's performances are slightly more complex to the extent that he conflates the two; in short, he does not simply take on the role of another character – he actually *is* that other character whom he is performing on stage. From this perspective, he is, or rather he gradually becomes, a lived embodiment of his own work, a discursive subject-in-process.

<sup>3</sup> It is important to note at the outset, as Campbell and Spackman do, that Franko B's work cannot be neatly categorized. Hence I am not suggesting that his work is explicitly 'about AIDS, sadomasochism, and the predicament of being queer in a straight society' (60). Such formulations close off the interpretative field instead of opening it out to a plenitude of possibilities. I would agree with Campbell and Spackman that there is added significance to the fact that Franko B does not use language in his work, only images. What I am suggesting, however, is that his work can easily lend itself to sadomasochistic critiques – even despite his intentions – because it feeds into the sadistic desires of certain sectors or echelons of society to witness the pain of an other (since Franko B objectifies himself in his work) and derive pleasure from it. At the same time, there could be an easy slippage since Franko B's work can lead to vicarious identification or sympathy for the other *in reverse*, as the other mirrors for us a position we could have been in, yet have escaped from in the nick of time. Franko B reminds us of the condition of our own mortality and almost enacts his own death *in the place of our own*. Such

subtle transitions confuse the boundaries between self and other, life and death, presence and absence. Thus the interpretative field is still pregnant with multiple possibilities depending on how open (or even conscious) the spectator is to such slippages. It is also worthy to note that Franko B has little, if any, control regarding the reception of his work. He may demand our sympathy and protest that his work is not about sadomasochism but from the very moment that he gives himself up to the spectator his work becomes open to the spectator's interpretation. Similarly, in *The Death of the Author* (1977), trans. by Richard Howard, Barthes claims that the author of any text must metaphorically 'die' in order for the reader to be born: 'We are now beginning to let ourselves be fooled no longer by the arrogant antiphrastical recriminations of good society in favour of the very thing it sets aside, ignores, smothers, or destroys; we know that to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.' Net web page: <http://evans-experientialism.freewebspace.com/barthes06.htm> [accessed 29th January 2012].

<sup>4</sup> This is not to suggest that such performances cannot engender critical thinking, only that the mode of thinking needs to be an embodied one as well. As Taxidou points out in *Tragedy, Modernity and Mourning*: 'The fact that the relationship with the stage is primarily one of topology (of bodies, things and places) does not imply that it is anti-critical or anti-intellectual in general. The kind of 'thinking' it generates is at the level of concepts rather than ideas, mirroring the opposition of symbol to allegory' (92).

<sup>5</sup> See also Judith Butler's essay 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,' *Theatre Journal* 40.4 (Baltimore: JHU Press, 1988), pp. 519-531 (525): 'The act that gender is, the act that embodied agents *are* inasmuch as they dramatically and actively embody and, indeed, *wear* certain cultural significations, is clearly not one's act alone. Surely, there are nuanced and individual ways of *doing* one's gender, but *that* one does it, and that one does it *in accord with* certain sanctions and proscriptions, is clearly not a fully individual matter.'

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Judith Butler, in *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), where the subject is described as being 'discontinuous' and incomplete, 'never coherent and never self-identical precisely because it is founded and, indeed, continually refounded, through a set of defining foreclosures and repressions that constitute the discontinuity and incompleteness of the subject.' Butler draws on Žižek's account of the fluid contingency of all subjective identity. For Žižek subjectivity is never a fully coherent, self-enclosed or self-referential system. It is always marked by what exceeds symbolization, what must be left out of signification or foreclosed in order for identity to constitute itself. Thus 'every signifier [of identity] is the site of a perpetual *méconnaissance*; it produces the expectation of a unity, a full and final recognition that can never be achieved' (pp. 190-1). Thus appellations such as 'woman' or 'gay' are only 'phantasmatic' markers of identity. The self is constantly being shaped by social and ideological discourses – the subject is always a discursive subject-in-process.

<sup>7</sup> Favazza's description of the process of shamanic initiation is quite an interesting one. It involves 'go[ing] through a traditional sequence of mystical events' in order to resolve crisis and emerge finally into a state of 'resurrection' or grace. The would-be shamans are transported through trances into 'Hell' where their heads are decapitated and their bodies dismembered. Once they 'learn the secrets of healing' they can 'emerge from the underworld with a new personality, that of a true shaman' (25). Interestingly, Favazza claims that such people 'have discovered the therapeutic value of self-mutilation' (26). Franko B has often asserted in the past that his work has allowed him to give meaning to his life and to make it worthwhile. I am also reminded here of Orlan's use of religious symbolism in her work and her explicit desires to attain 'a new personality' through reincarnation. That she dubs herself as 'Saint Orlan' is a case in point.

<sup>8</sup> I am using the terms 'blood play' here in a very specific way and as a pun or variation on Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept of wordplay. For the philosopher Wittgenstein language was a kind of game in which words acquired meaning by being used in specific contexts. There was space for some manoeuvring but meaning was usually constructed within a predefined set of grammatical rules and almost never out of context. In this respect many philosophical questions such as 'What is truth?' become meaningless wordplay. Incidentally, Wittgenstein used the word 'queer' in relation to experience and Jonathan Katz makes much of this in his essay entitled 'Dismembership: Jasper Johns and the body politic,' in *Performing the Body/Performing the Text*, ed. by Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson (London & New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 170-85. He talks of 'queer' knowledge which, 'because it is felt more than thought, cannot be communicated to another except through metaphors or other approximations. It divides us from one another – unlike most other forms of knowing, such as language, which unite us.' To 'queer' a body is to open it out to a multitude of meanings 'in order to query authoritative usage. It is to refuse boundaries and borders and delimited

knowledges' (172). For the British psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott the 'play' between the patient and therapist was an integral part of the psychotherapeutic process. By playing with his own blood, Franko B is therapeutically healing himself and reaching out to his spectators/analysts at the same time. Metaphorically speaking, blood play makes all fixed social constructions of sex, identity and gender into 'fluid' entities, or rather, and due to its very nature, it 'fluidifies' them.

<sup>9</sup> It could be argued that the varied responses to Franko B's performances are due to the different ways in which the spectators interpret the cuts on his body. The cuts are like enigmatic signifiers – of sexual difference, abjection and unstable identity positions. As well as this, they can also function as erotically charged wounds or as 'stigmata' in religious and iconic terms.

<sup>10</sup> To push this point further, it is interesting to note that Franko B uses only scrap objects as opposed to new ones. He gives marginalized and seemingly worthless objects a new lease on life. He says of his work that it is not really intended to 'humanize' the object 'but give something else a second chance to have a life of its own, to give love to an object, like a broken TV.' He stresses that he wouldn't buy a car because that 'would change the object's meaning and the work' (Simonson 317; 318).

<sup>11</sup> This is nowhere more evident, perhaps, than in Orlan's work. Barbara Rose notes: 'As the French representative to the Sydney Biennial in December 1992, she included in the exhibition vials containing samples of her liquefied flesh and blood drained off during the "body-sculpting" part of the operations. These relics are also intended to be marketed to raise funds for the two remaining operations.' See note 9, Chapter 5. I am also reminded of the famous American killer Ed Gein who used to cut off women's body parts and use them as ornaments around his farmhouse in the late 50s. He had used human skin to make a lampshade and had even created a 'skinsuit' from a female torso. Upon his capture many of his personal items were auctioned off and he became something of a notorious celebrity, attesting to the public's fascination, but also disgust, with his bloody exploits. He was the inspiration, in fact, for mainstream films such as *Psycho* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. In many cases, skin, blood and gore are not only voyeuristically fetishized but also commercialized in consumerist culture.

<sup>12</sup> Kristeva, qtd. in Michel Beaujour, 'A Propos of a Separation in Julia Kristeva's *La Révolution Du Langage Poétique*,' pp. 15-35 (33, note 6). In *The Kristeva Critical Reader*, ed. by John Lechte and Mary Zournazi (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Shoshana Felman's critical stance of the relationship of psychoanalytic interpretation to literature. For her, 'literature is considered as a body of *language* – to *be interpreted*.' In contrast, 'psychoanalysis is considered as a body of *knowledge*' whose task is 'to *interpret*.' Psychoanalysis, in other words, occupies the place of a *subject*, literature that of an *object*; the relation of interpretation is structured as a relation of master to slave' (qtd. in Ellmann 10). This draws on the Hegelian master-slave dialectic and serves to illustrate the processes involved in hermeneutical activity: 'To some degree or other all interpretation must curtail the meanings of the text in order to render them intelligible. Perhaps this is why so many of our words for understanding also carry connotations of possession, violation, and constraint: we 'grasp' or 'seize' or 'apprehend' the things we know, much as we might apprehend a fugitive from justice' (Ellmann 10-1).

<sup>14</sup> In psychoanalytical terms, erotic signifiers always reach their destination, which is the unconscious. We have already seen how Manuel Cambor links psychoanalytical frameworks with scholarship regarding spectatorial responses. If, as Cambor forcefully suggests in 'Death Drive's Joy Ride: David Cronenberg's *Crash*,' sexuality for Lacan is 'the reality of the unconscious,' then 'the eroticized emission and reception of a signifier [...] effectively establishes an area of contact with the unconscious.' Cambor is, of course, referring specifically to David Cronenberg's film *Crash*, and how the characters' wounds within the film could be made to signify, thus becoming traumatic wounds if they are visually perceived and 'received' by the spectators as being erotic – if they succeed, that is, in reaching their destination, which is the spectator's unconscious. When the unconscious is thus broached, spectators may potentially recognize these wounds as highly erotic and painful markers and this can activate their own unconscious fantasies and desires. The spectators in Franko B's performances may also be confronted with the same dilemma. As we have already seen, wounds are highly charged with erotic energy. And, not only do they function as erotic signifiers, but they also have the potential to breach the spectator's consciousness in unexpected ways. Spectators are as much attracted to Franko B's body as they are repulsed by it. Revulsion, even fear, is a permutation of desire. At the same time, the audience may also be stunned into silence by the religious symbolism elicited by the cuts-cum-wounds-cum-stigmata. See note 18 of the Introduction section.

<sup>15</sup> It should be noted here that Diamond is using Brechtian theory for very different purposes and to achieve other ends than those of other feminists in theatre and performance studies. Namely, she is employing what she calls 'gestic' feminist criticism in order to show the potentialities of Brechtian

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discourse for feminist theory and thus propose an intertextual way of reading and interpreting theatre criticism. My focal angle, on the other hand, and in terms of spectatorship, encompasses more than just one gender-specific or even feminist/theoretical topos. In short, I am looking at spectatorship *in general* as opposed to specific subgroups. It could also be argued that Brechtian discourse cannot be fruitfully employed in relation to Franko B's performances since *Verfremdungseffekt* necessarily implies, as a property of acting, the distancing between the actor's body and the character he is meant to resemble or act out. Yet Franko B is both actor and character at the same time – the character he acts out is his own.

<sup>16</sup> I am reminded here of Derrida's assertion that 'the future is necessarily monstrous: the figure of the future, that is, that which can only be surprising, that for which we are not prepared [...] is heralded by species of monsters' (*From Traumatism to Promise* 386-7). Yet this monster is somehow made 'legible': it is inevitably accommodated, acculturated, even normalized. By the same token, future 'monsters' of technology are waiting to be realized and accommodated within society.

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