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Subject matter: feminism, interiority, and literary embodiment after 1980

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SUBJECT MATTER: FEMINISM, INTERIORITY, AND LITERARY EMBODIMENT AFTER 1980

by

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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ABSTRACT

I argue that literary texts after 1980 use the fluid relationship between matter and discourse within the literary object itself in order to present alternate versions of the subjectivity and interiority. Examining works by Morrison, Gibson, Acker, Kane, and Jackson, I demonstrate the ways in which these texts revise and reinterpret the dualist division of mind and body by offering bodily metaphors for their character's interior emotional lives. Taking a cue from recent new materialist scholarship, I argue that these metaphorizations of the body blur the boundaries between the corporeal and the abstract, not simply by granting the body representational agency, but also by proposing that the interiors of subjects, or even metaphors themselves, have unexpected materiality.

I emphasize the political implications of the kinds of bodies employed in these metaphors and the representational labor they take on, setting this against the background of the body politics of late twentieth century feminism. I read my primary texts alongside the work of Kristeva, Cixous, Irigary, and others, in order to chart the parallel projects of literature and poststructuralist theory in articulating the relationship between the female body and masculine economies of representation. Starting with the 1980s, when the second wave feminist movement suffered conservative backlash, and continuing through the development of the third wave, I examine literary theorizations of feminist concerns during a period of transition in the feminist movement itself.

My first chapter looks at the use of the pregnant body in descriptions of character self-address in *Beloved*, arguing that Morrison's deployment of this metaphor challenges damaging descriptions of black maternal corporeality. I supplement my analysis of the novel with Kristeva's writings on maternity, as well as a contextualizing analysis of the

rhetorical similarities between descriptions of the black body as an "empty vessel" for white investment in the time of slavery and figurations of that same body in the Reagan era. My second chapter, on the presentation of the copied body in *Neuromancer* (and revisions of that presentation in *Empire of the Senseless*), continues chapter one's analysis of figurations of the "empty" female body, this time using a set of texts that test the boundaries of this metaphor through storyworlds in which the body can be more literally duplicated, remotely inhabited, and hollowed out. I explore the relationship between these two texts alongside Cixous's writings on the position of the feminine in men's self-representation, as well as contemporaneous activism against real world gendered violence.

My third chapter moves into the 1990s, where I read the bodies of couples—bodies which are mutilated and modified throughout Kane's play, *Cleansed*—against third wave critiques of romantic love, as well as Irigaray's writings on distance and intimacy. I argue that Grace's physical transformation into the body of her lover is not an attempt to merge two separate humans into one, but an argument for the internal heterogeneity of individual subjects. This blurring of the relationship between interior subjectivity and the external operation of the body, increasingly present in the first three chapters, reaches its fullest expression in my fourth and final chapter. I examine *The Melancholy of Anatomy*, in which body materials like blood and fat are dislodged from their anatomical homes, sometimes even being made into new, non-human subjects. I argue that this revises treatments of the body, and matter itself, as relentlessly linked with death and vulnerability, placing them rather as sources of life and animation, both in the extra-textual world and within the surprisingly material world of the text itself.

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

I argue that literary texts after 1980 use the fluid relationship between the physical world and the world of writing in order to present alternate versions of the body's relationship to the mind. Examining works by Toni Morrison, William Gibson, Kathy Acker, Sarah Kane, and Shelley Jackson, I demonstrate the ways in which these texts reinterpret the relationship between mind and body by offering bodily metaphors for their character's interior emotional lives; they compare this inner life to a pregnant mother, a sexual couple, and more. I emphasize the political implications of the kinds of bodies employed in these metaphors, setting this against the background of late twentieth century feminism. I read my primary texts alongside the work of Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigary, and others, in order to chart the parallel projects of literature and theory in articulating the relationship between the body—especially, the female body—and our understandings of subjectivity and representation. Starting with the 1980s, when the second wave feminist movement suffered conservative backlash, and continuing through the development of the third wave, I examine literary theorizations of feminist concerns during a period of transition in the feminist movement itself.

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INTRODUCTION

> 'This is not really happening,' Minky Momo muttered as the Normopath pulled her smock over her head. Beneath it, he discovered a laughing red fox. He unzipped its head. A Prussian soldier appeared. He unzipped it again. A grey squirrel costumed as a 19th C. czarina. Plunging his hand down beneath several layers of costume, the Normopath encountered a stretch of silky flesh. Mmm, he thought to himself, as soft as dandelions poking out of a dead soldier's custardy eye! He excavated the body. The graceful shoulders of a young man appeared, then the horns, then the belly & thighs, lavishly smeared with semen. 'So this is what you've been up to, o reprobate lover!' the Normopath exclaimed, slyly stroking the boy's testicles & popping off his head. And o! Then the real Minky Momo did appear! Metal teeth gnashing, she flew out of the pile of costumes, her missing arm firing diamond bullets into the Normopath's cotton-stuffed, ammo-sucking head.
>
> -Glenum, *Maximum Gaga* (33)

Lara Glenum's poem "Will The Real Minky Momo Please Step Forward," is an installment of a surreal narrative that follows the interactions of two characters, the Normopath and Minky Momo. This particular poem, partially quoted above, shows the Normopath stripping away outer layers of body/costume from Minky Momo as part of a coercive sexual play in which he tries to penetrate to her "real" interior self. Emerging at last, Minky Momo takes her revenge on the Normopath by repeatedly shooting him, then reclaims her "real" self by taking on one final exterior layer, far more sexual than any of the layers the Normopath encountered: "Minky Momo / stretches her labia around her body / like a cocoon / & zips herself inside / & starts to holla" (34).[1] This poem works through the topic of subjectivity through a graphic and irreverent

[1] This quoted passage is separated from the earlier portion of the poem by a page break, despite the fact that the previous page has ample space to accommodate it. While there isn't time to analyze this choice at length, it is worth noting that Minky Momo's physical and sexual self-ownership involve a literal turning of the page, separating her from the Normopath through the material page itself. Further, though this is not visually reflected in the quote, her final moments in this poem are spread liberally across the page space, so that the compression and release that are thematized in the poem are visually presented in the juxtaposition between its first and second pages.

literalization of the common rhetorical descriptions of private emotional life as "interior" and physical embodiment as "exterior." Here, the attempt to access someone's subjective interior is played out as a literal shedding of external layers of enculturation and embodiment, until the authentic self is revealed. This dissertation examines the relationship between this interior, the presentations of embodiment that accompany it, and their dialogue with the evolution of feminist thought after 1980.

Historical Context

The last decades of the twentieth century tested the impact of the women's movement on politics and popular culture, and we still, in the early 21st century, are struggling to articulate our relationship to a movement that is simultaneously framed (if not experienced) as being a thing of the past and a crisis of the present. I begin my study in the 1980s as a way of comparing the evolution of feminist thought—particularly, feminist articulations of embodiment—in the relationship between literature and theory. Having entered popular discourse in a whole new way in the 1970s, feminism in and beyond the 1980s was met with a fierce backlash. Not only did the Reagan and Thatcher administrations of the 1980s have a devastating impact on feminist political agendas in the U.S. and England, but the conservative movements that brought them to victory powerfully reshaped the popular vocabulary for discussing morality, sexuality, and family life in the 1990s as well. As Sylvia Bashevkin argues, these conservative ideologies did not disappear with the elections of Bill Clinton and Tony Blair, whose moderate political stances were themselves articulated with a 'family values' rhetoric borrowed from their conservative forebears (202-220). Writing within that historical moment, Imelda Whelehan suggests that, while women's interest organizations were nevertheless finding a place within the mainstream

U.S. political system, feminists in the United Kingdom were more liable to "operate at one remove from mainstream parliamentary politics and social institutions – perhaps rightly feminists have regarded the prospect of fully integrating into such a phallocentric stronghold with profound suspicion" (128). The tension between the incorporation of feminist values into institutions themselves (at the risk of diluting the political impact of that feminism by mainstreaming it) and the need for continued agitation from the political margins occurs against the backdrop of shifting definitions of feminism itself in popular consciousness. The neo-conservative backlash against feminism's gains did not simply come in the form of reversing feminist political agendas (though present-day anti-abortion legislation, for example, makes clear that this still remains a central part of conservative response), but in shaping the popular rhetoric around feminism itself, to the extent that feminist political action began to require an accompanying distancing gesture—what has evolved into the too often used, "I'm not a feminist, but…"

By beginning with 1980 and continuing to the early 21st century, I am also spanning what is often read as a generational shift in feminism itself, with the 1980s as a transitional period between the second wave feminism of the 1970s and the third wave feminism of the 1990s and beyond. In many ways, this is a period in the evolution of feminist thought for which we are still struggling to find language, and the language we too easily fall into when describing that shift has, I believe, too many of its roots in the very rhetoric used to limit feminism's political impact. For example, Leandra Zarnow identifies an insidious insistence on the metaphor of mother-daughter relationships from both sides of the divide between second and third wave critics, one that obscures the more complex relationship between feminists of the 1970s and 1990s. This metaphor, I'd argue, is at least partially indebted to a conservative rhetoric aimed at diminishing

feminism by reducing an important stage in its evolution to a cat fight between a bratty, clueless daughter and her aging, sexless mom. Zarnow argues that "dichotomous characterizations of so-called second and third wave feminists—politically rigid versus apolitical, puritanical versus hypersexual, culturally unsophisticated versus self-absorbed and entitled—preclude complex analysis of current feminisms" (274).

This descriptive struggle exists not only in popular rhetoric, but in academia as well. It is difficult to separate the politics and philosophies of the third wave from the difficulty the academic community has had in finding a language to describe it, perhaps because the emergence of second wave values into some areas of the contemporaneous academic community (including, but not limited to, the work of second wave feminists in establishing Women's Studies as a field) has had a powerful impact on how the relationship between these two movements has been conceived. Leandra Zarnow also questions the rigor that has been used in framing the third wave historically: "Lacking sophisticated historical grounding, [the few treatments of this movement] often take at face value the origin stories promoted by self-identified third wavers" (275). Leela Fernandes notes that the "wave" metaphor itself not only obscures the continuities between these two, but that it actually undoes some of the intellectual work for which the third wave has come to be known. For example, she argues that the equivalence drawn between multiculturalism and third wave feminism not only obscures the feminist work done by women of color in the 1970s, but that it creates a compartmentalization that reinforces, rather than undoes, marginalization of women of color in the present day, in which "the varied intellectual contributions of U.S. feminists of color become reducible to the creation of 'women of color' as a singular identity category" (101-102).

Clare Hemmings offers a compelling study on the relationship between the evolution of late twentieth century feminism and the narratives offered within the movement to frame its progress. One particular trend she notes is the tendency to separate other intellectual and artistic movements from "their complex feminist histories," so that postmodernism and poststructuralism "emerge oddly subjectless and without reference to contests that characterize their own inclusions and exclusions" (6). She goes on to argue that this lays the ground work for a "return narrative," in which feminism is tasked with recuperating the body following two decades of theory's and culture's forays into intellectual abstraction:

> [P]ostmodernism and poststructuralism need to be rendered as wholly abstract in order for the plea for a return to 'the body' or 'the social' to make sense. Indeed, these imperatives are recast in return narratives as the very reason we need to move away from postmodernism and poststructuralism: repeated cries of 'Whither the body? Whither the material?' are not meant to be resolved but serve as rhetorical gestures that anchor Western feminist historiography. (6-7)

This dissertation's examination of literary and critical texts during this period offers a narrative that complicates the one Hemmings both identifies and critiques here. Rather than a movement away from the body, I find in this period an intense preoccupation with the body, not only in the descriptions of its fleshly experience, but in its deployment as a metaphor for describing subjectivity and character itself. I argue not that we are returning to the body, but that the body has been here all along, woven into the very ways we think about both materiality and abstraction, bringing with it a set of implicitly feminist politics into our most interior lives. Like Lara Glenum's poem, there is no interior that can fully strip the body away; the body is written into the very ideas that structure our relationship to interiority itself.

Literary Critical Context

Like the Glenum poem quoted above, I'm interested in examining and troubling the relationship between the body as a vessel and the subject as its contents. Descriptions of embodied subjectivity as a relationship between physical exteriority and abstract emotional interiority, appear not only in descriptions of conventional personhood, but also in the critical treatment of literary character. Alex Woloch's 2004 study, *The one vs the many: minor characters and the space of the protagonist in the novel*, outlines the two dominant twentieth century approaches to character. The first, a referential approach, treats characters as fully formed human beings whose psychological interiority is available for analysis and critique through the expression of their personalities in the world of the novel. The second, a formalist-indebted approach, emphasizes the character's status as a mechanical component of the narrative itself, focusing on the functional purposes it serves rather than an implicitly sentimental reading of the character's pretended personhood. Woloch intervenes in the space between these approaches, offering a theory of partially inflected character. He suggests that a character's function in the text has the effect of determining the amount of referential personality that will rise to the reader's attention, and that the allotment of attention or "character-space" each personality is given will determine the kind of character functions they take on. Focusing specifically on minor characters, Woloch charts "character-space" in ways that have, at their base, an assumption of interior personality and external embodiment; he charts the extent to which the formal constraints of a character's function do or do not grant access to their assumed interior personality. However, the examples that Woloch analyzes are curiously, and I think, instructively, inconsistent as to the location of that interior and exterior. In his analysis, the exterior barriers which have the power to either obscure the interior life from view or to create an

opening that reveals this interior are located not simply in the described body of the character, but also in the discursive plane of the text itself.[2] Woloch does not explicitly announce the similarity of body and discourse as the available exteriors that demarcate the boundaries of the character, but his use of both body and discourse in outlining a character's textual position opens the way for further inquiry in that direction.

The convention of emotional internality and embodied externality draws on mind-body dualism. Elizabeth Grosz discusses the intellectual inheritance of this dualism across multiple areas of thought in the centuries following Descartes's writing, noting one approach which "commonly regards the body in terms of metaphors that construe it as an instrument, a tool, or a machine at the disposal of consciousness, a *vessel* occupied by an animating, willful subjectivity" (1994 8, emphasis mine). She goes on to discuss another, related approach, in which: "the body is commonly considered a signifying medium, a vehicle of expression, a mode of rendering public and communicable what is essentially private […] It is through the body that the subject can express his or her interiority, and it is through the body that he or she can receive, code, and translate the inputs of the 'external' world" (1994 9). Grosz discusses the ways in which the very rhetoric of internality and externality built into a Cartesian description of the mind/body divide positions the body as the boundary marker for externality. From this approach, the body becomes subordinate, a mere instrument of the mind through which the latter can influence the outer world without contacting (and, in some versions, without being tainted by) its materiality.

[2] See especially his analysis of flat versus fragmentary characters in *Jane Eyre,* in which he describes one character's unreadable face and another's violent clashing against the textual plane itself as performing a parallel acts of restraint against the unexpressed interiors of these respective characters (25).

One especially problematic feature of this dualism is its tendency to extend this subordination of body to mind to forms of social subordination. The cultural primacy of white, heterosexual masculinity results in the bodily markers of whiteness, heterosexuality, and masculinity being largely erased through the assumption of their normativity. Instead, the deviations from these norms, in the form of black, queer, and female bodies, among many others, are left to bear the cultural weight of embodiment itself, through a deeply entrenched set of cultural practices that figures them as more bodily in a pejorative, primitivist sense. Grosz, taking a cue from Irigaray, describes this cultural weight as it relates to women's bodies, in which women "become the living representatives of corporeality, of domesticity, of the natural order that men have had to expel from their own self-representations in order to construct themselves as above-the-mundane, beyond the merely material" (1995 122). Grosz describes an economy by which the resignation of women to the corporeal functions to clear the way for a masculinity that, once free of the body, can reside entirely in the realm of ideas.

It is against this economy that much of poststructuralist feminist theory positions itself in the late decades of the twentieth century. Rather than succumbing to what Hemmings argues was figured as a largely abstract and apolitical set of intellectual projects, the feminist theory of this period was deeply invested, not only in examining the body, but in following that body into the supposedly abstract machinery of masculinist representation in order to make it visible, to rescue it from the pressure to disappear in the name of phallogocentrism. As Hélène Cixous points out, one effect of completely aligning women with the body is not only to constrain women but to force them to disappear into and through those bodies: "Where is she, where is woman in all the spaces he surveys, in all the scenes he stages within the literary enclosure? Shut out of his

system's space, she is the repressed that ensures the system's functioning" (1986 68). Luce Irigaray voices a challenge to the subordination of the feminine, pointing specifically to the conflation of women with the material: "The feminine, the maternal are instantly frozen by the 'like,' the 'as if' of that masculine representation […] *while any hint of their material elements*, is turned into scenery to make the show more realistic" (*Speculum of the Other Woman* 265, emphasis mine). In her classic critique of phallogocentrism, Irigaray identifies a masculine economy of representation in which the materiality of the female body is erased in its appropriation as part of the machinery of representation itself. The work done in and beyond post-structuralist feminism identifies this problematic consignment of women to the corporeal, but does not suggest a disavowal of the body as a strategy for combatting it. Indeed, part of the protest Irigaray and others make above is against the erasure of the body within systems of representation, a problem that requires a reorganization of the way that bodies are figured and the way representation operates. Even in the far more recent Glenum poem quoted at the start of this introduction, Minky Momo's revenge comes not through a rejection of the bodily exterior in favor of her revealed "real" self, but through a feminist re-embodiment in which she wraps herself in her own vulva, a bodily position that facilitates, *rather than blocks*, the voice with which she can now "holla."[3]

Recent critical work in the area of new materialism similarly demands that the body (and, in fact, materiality itself) be resituated as the point of origin for theorizations of the relationship between mind and matter, culture and nature. In their introduction to *New Materialisms:*

[3] I'm leaving largely unexamined some of the racial dimensions of this final gesture. I read this poem's title as a satirization of the line "will the real Slim Shady please stand up" from Eminem's song "The Real Slim Shady," the video for which juggles many of the same concerns with authenticity, multiplicity, embodiment, and sexuality as the poem. I wonder to what extent the choice of the word "holla" proceeds from that reading of Eminem (as a white man working in a genre and with a set of language conventions that originate in the black community).

Ontology, Agency, and Politics, Diana Coole and Samantha Frost offer a direct critique of Cartesian dualism, as well as the hierarchies its inheritance props up:

> The corollary of this calculable natural world was not, as one might have expected, a determinism that renders human agency an illusion but a sense of mastery bequeathed to the thinking subject: the *cogito* (I think) that Descartes identified as ontologically other than matter. In distinction from the passivity of matter, modern philosophy has variously portrayed humans as rational, self-aware, free, and self-moving agents (8).

Especially provocative is the unexpected twist they point to in Descartes's logic; that his conception of the *cogito*'s privilege as unattached and self-directing is inconsistent with that *cogito*'s emplacement in a world whose materialism is so fixed, so effectively deadened and heavy that self-direction in matter's midst would appear impossible. In addition to the work already being undertaken by new materialists to reestablish, as Jane Bennett would put it, the "vibrancy of matter," this reading of Descartes opens up another avenue of inquiry: the new position of consciousness in the wake of a reappraisal of the material. Grosz points out that the Cartesian positioning of the *cogito* as immaterial is already paradoxical, given the assumption of its site as interior to the physical body (1994 6-7). What might the supposedly immaterial realm of consciousness look like if we explore the materiality implicit in our figuration of it as interior?

Metaphorical Bodies

This dissertation examines the presentation of subjective interiority within literary texts, and the kinds of bodies through which they are expressed to the reader. Taking somewhat literally the "space" of Woloch's "character-space," I analyze the way that characters' interior emotional lives are expressed through metaphors that physicalize that interior, presenting kinds of self-relation and self-address that depend upon a language of interaction across physical space.

I specifically focus on the way that these interior "spaces" are presented, not as immaterial, but through the model of the fleshly body. Each chapter analyzes a kind of body from which these emotional interiors draw their shape, as well as the ramifications of these choices for the presentation of characters' actual bodies within the storyworld of the text. Alongside each literary text, I read the contemporaneous feminist theory with which these texts are in (sometimes implicit, sometimes overtly announced) conversation. Cumulatively, the chapters present a set of evolving and dynamic feminist approaches to embodied subjectivity as the twentieth century drew to a close and the twenty-first century began.

Throughout this dissertation I discuss the relationship between the body and metaphor, and the use of what I call *metaphorical bodies* both in and beyond literary texts. I principally make recourse to the notion of "metaphorical bodies" when discussing the ways that psychological interiorities are represented via models of fleshly bodies, when the way a character addresses herself within her own mind is described as if she is addressing a separate person with a separate body: her fetus, her double, her lover, or some other kind of body entirely. I also extend this term to discuss the relationships between those literary metaphors and more obviously material bodies in the extra-textual world and, in so doing, question these metaphors' materiality in each respective setting. Metaphor, in and of itself, is a slippery topic to approach through a new materialist lens. When Shakespeare writes that love is "an ever fixed mark," we straddle the material and the abstract to read his metaphor. Most obviously, *love*, the concept, seems largely abstract (even if love presents in undeniably material aspects of our lives), yet *mark* is resoundingly material. The vehicle's materiality is reinforced through the emphasis on its fixity. Yet the operation by which the "ever fixed mark" demonstrates the nature of love entails a shuttling back and forth between abstraction and materiality. In order for the metaphor to be

comprehensible, the qualities by which the fixed mark could be said to "[look] on tempests, and [be] never shaken" are dislodged from maritime navigational situations and conferred upon love, rather than the stormy seas (though even there, the metaphor leaks, seeping into what become the stormy seas of love). Etymologically, *metaphor* implies both a transfer, a movement up and across, as well as the labor of carrying or bearing; the word itself, then, is built through simultaneous dislocation, abstraction, and material labor. Metaphor itself operates through a movement across the very spectrum of materiality that new materialist critics propose as an alternative to binary descriptions of the concrete versus the abstract. Part of metaphor's function is to dislodge the vehicle from its usual position (including, but not limited to, physical emplacement), illuminating its properties—properties which are descriptively arrived at through a scrambling of the materiality of the tenor and vehicle's respective home settings, rather than through the explicit abstraction commonly associated with the figurative.

While it is tempting to site the physicality of metaphor solely in the referent, many "real world" material practices operate through metaphor. For example, Elaine Scarry's analysis of torture makes clear that a significant component of even the most intensely physical aspects of interrogation utilize the body of the victim as a metaphorical vehicle—as well as a physical vehicle—for the interrogator's own power, making it "the agent of [the victim's] agony" (47). In this scenario, any clean separation between metaphorical and fleshly vehicles breaks down. She writes: "The goal of the torturer is to make the one, the body, emphatically and crushingly *present* by destroying it, and to make the other, voice, *absent* by destroying it" (Body in Pain 49). What the body is made to represent for the victim of torture and what the body materially experiences become inseparable, and part of the "crushingly present" quality of the body is its inescapability. The body is both the *medium* of pain and itself becomes pain; it carries the

representational and also the sensorial weight of communicating the victim's position to him, and it does so by being inexorably materially available to the victim, but not in ways that allow him to construct any meaning other than the one the torturer thrusts upon him. Coole and Frost argue that "matter *becomes*" (10, emphasis in original); in this example (as in others), this becoming is materially produced through an act of metaphor, such that the tortured body only becomes available for apprehension through this horrific mode of figuration. Torture makes the victim's body for him, against his will.

What lingers, then, of the physicality of less extreme and more literary metaphor; can metaphor be said to perform "labor" when it appears in a work of literature? It's easiest to identify the labor of metaphor on the page as having a correspondence with, rather than literally performing, the representational work that material bodies perform in the world beyond text—to see literary metaphor as still an abstraction. But I want to suggest that this removed understanding of metaphor as only figuratively laboring is not quite sufficient. If we are truly to disrupt binaries between mind and body, culture and nature, and proceed from a new materialist starting point, we have to make room not only to see in supposedly inanimate objects a kind of agency, but also to recognize in supposedly immaterial realms of discourse and representation a kind of materiality, even if it is a materiality that emerges differently than we might expect. I'm not just arguing that there is a literal physicality to the paper and ink media of literature (media which is, to differing degrees, brought to the reader's attention through experiments with the visual, paratextual and technological presentation of a text). This is true, and is, at points, crucial to my analysis. Rather, I am suggesting that, across literature, there is *also* a materiality to what we are used to describing as a set of textual ideas. We see this in chapter three, for example, in which the bodies of actors on stage in Sarah Kane's 1998 play, *Cleansed*, are repeatedly used to

test the limits of text's ability to manifest physically, whether through provocative twists on Austin's "speech acts" or the violence committed by disembodied "Voices" that are both absent and present on the stage. Drama, as a genre, already works through a complicated relationship between scripted text and the material manifestation of that text on a stage, though I argue that this kind of relationship between text and material informs other genres, albeit in ways specific to each medium under consideration. We see it, too, in Kathy Acker's plagiarism practice, which I discuss in chapter two. Acker uses this plagiarism as a mode of entrance into both the body and the ideas of a William Gibson novel; even if we read her entrance as an abstraction, the physical emplacement of his words into her text is undeniably material, and out of that materiality a working metaphor for intertextual engagement emerges inseparably from the copied language in which it is situated; the materiality with which this metaphor begins leaks provocatively into other, seemingly more abstract, areas of textual play. The texts do not produce bodies in the way that torturers do, because these bodies are not the kind that walk down the street in the extra-textual world, but these bodies nonetheless share space on a spectrum of materiality whose properties are tested and reworked text by text, alongside contemporaneous feminist activism to reclaim the body in all of its social and theoretical spaces. What we see in the examples above, and in the many more that I engage in each chapter, is not only a deployment of a text's more obviously material dimensions in the construction of its metaphors, but a refusal to ever fully leave this expectation of materiality behind in a transit back to the supposedly abstract realm of ideas.

Coole and Frost describe new materialism as emerging out of a set of concerns for the material (including, but not limited to, the fleshly body). Though they acknowledge that a group of similar concerns emerge in earlier feminist theory, identity politics, and Marxist theory, Coole

and Frost posit that these approaches risk glossing over the agential quality of matter not only as gendered, political, or economic, but also as particulate and physical (a risk that emerges, perhaps, from the very narratives of poststructural abstraction that feminists deployed to argue for the need to "return" to the body). Particular among Coole and Frost's concerns is the tendency for late twentieth and early twenty-first century theorizations of matter to over-emphasize the natural world's status as a construct, a discursively produced "material" that is finally only available for apprehension and interpretation through a theoretical and ideological rubric, particularly under a poststructuralist rubric that is assumed to regard apprehension primarily *as language*. While this linguistic and representational focus is an understandable and important concern, I'd like to pause and consider to what extent a wholesale abandonment of the material in favor of the discursive is actually happening. Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter*, for example, argues that the body is discursively produced, in that the body is available to us only through a set of interpretive practices that allow us to make sense of it, rather than existing in an untouched "natural" state prior to the layering on of cultural expectations. Yet, Butler does not suggest that the materiality of the body is merely an effect of discourse; the opening sentences of *Bodies that Matter* address this potential misreading[4] directly: "Sexual difference […] is never simply a function of material differences which are not in some way both marked and formed by discursive practices. Further, to claim that sexual differences are indissociable from discursive demarcations is not the same as claiming that discourse causes sexual difference" (cite). Partly, what makes new materialism new, if it is, comes down to what we mean when we say that the body is discursively *produced*, what we think happens at the site of that production, and what

[4] This is not a misreading of Butler, specifically, that I believe Coole, Frost, and others perform. Rather, I use her writing as an example of a discursively driven approach that still leaves room for the material. Within Coole and Frost's collection, there are essays that do engage Butler's work, though briefly.

relation to language we assume materiality maintains on the far side of that process. To produce the body through language is still to produce a *body*, and to insist that nature does not precede culture is not to say that culture precedes or dictates nature. The simultaneous, intertwined, co-constitutive emergence of bodily material and cultural value is what allows both of these to be legible – we read material through discourse, but we also read discourse through material.

To read discourse through the material, I open chapter one with an examination of narrative as a metaphor (a material metaphor, as above) for the birth act. Drawing examples from Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, I argue that this novels specific figuration of pregnancy and birth offers a counter-rhetoric to the dualist-informed descriptions of contemporaneous black maternity, descriptions which themselves bear frightening resemblance to the very justifications offered for slavery itself. Cartesian descriptions of bodily material as passive subordinates to animating consciousness play out in both the novel and the world to which it referred by associating blackness with hypercorporeality animated from without by white law, and Morrison's use of pregnancy as a metaphor for her characters' interior emotional lives both combats the figuration of black bodies as empty "vessels" and positions the novel as its own pseudo-maternal enclosing body. Bodily enclosures transform to bodily inhabitability in Chapter Two, which begins with a critique of the presentation of the female body in William Gibson's *Neuromancer*. Set in a world in which both copying and inhabiting the bodies of others is technologically possible, I point to the ways in which this use of bodily material is consistently directed at female characters. Unlike *Beloved*, this presentation of female bodily enclosure does not function to illuminate the emotional interiors of these female characters, but instead appears as a precondition of masculine self-address that borrows its language from the mechanics of sexual violence. I follow these mechanics as they are taken up, and dramatically revised, in

Kathy Acker's *Empire of the Senseless*, which uses copies—not of bodies, but of text—to position *Neuromancer* itself as an inhabitable body, one that can be worked over and manipulated to feminist ends.

The revisions of dualist descriptions of materiality, embodiment, and interiority that appear in the first two chapters of my dissertation remain close to the source; even as they combat these metaphors and their extra-textual political implications, they do so from within models of embodiment that only partially revise Descartes'. Chapter Three argues that the presentation of couplehood in Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* gestures to dualist models of embodiment, as well as the rhetoric of love as a kind of emotional dislocation (itself a partial extrapolation of dualism), but that it does to only to depart, radically, in favor of a cooperative model of the body as a site of multiplicity, intimacy, and textuality. Though bodily enclosures and animating interiorities play a key role in the action of the play, particularly in the relationship between Grace and her dead-yet-somehow-animate brother, Graham, these enclosures and interiorities continually leak, interlock, and undo themselves in acts of resistance and rebellion that challenge both bodily and linguistic forms of containment and expression. Chapter Four picks up where Chapter Three's focus on reanimation leaves off, first by laying out the implications of dualist embodiment for the positioning of life, death, and dehumanization, then by following Shelley Jackson's short story collection *The Melancholy of Anatomy* as it uses grotesque corporeality to explode the very categories of internality and externality around which theorizations of the human are organized. Expanding outward from this chapter itself—breaking, as it were, its own textual boundary, I offer a conclusion inspired by Jackson's writings on the material emplacement of art, and the emplacement of our own bodies within the broader category of writing, in the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER ONE

"THIS IS YOUR MA'AM": BLACK MATERNAL BODIES, TEXTUAL INVESTMENTS, AND REVISING INTERIORS IN MORRISON'S *BELOVED*

> Back there she opened up her dress front and lifted her breast and pointed right under it. Right on her rib was a circle and a cross burnt right in the skin. She said, 'This is your ma'am. This,' and she pointed. 'I am the only one got this mark now. The rest dead. If something happens to me and you can't tell me by my face, you can know me by this mark.' Scared me so. All I could think of was how important this was and how I needed to have something important to say back, but I couldn't think of anything so I just said what I thought. 'Yes, Ma'am,' I said. 'But how will you know me? How will you know me? Mark me too,' I said. 'Mark the mark on me too.'
>
> Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (72-73)

Narrative Procreation

This chapter explores the way that the textual pregnancies of *Beloved* create opportunities for insight into the relationship between the interior life of subjects and the bodies that enclose them. I argue that the metaphor of pregnancy not only illuminates the way that literary subjects relate to themselves, but that it also revises toxic and damaging narratives about black embodiment that date back to slavery and continue, insidiously, through (and beyond) the time in which Morrison wrote the novel.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is a ghost story that creates a frighteningly literal connection between motherhood and storytelling. Former slave Sethe, having suppressed the trauma of her captivity in the years following her escape, must confront painful memories when she meets Beloved, a young woman who she later discovers to be her supernaturally resurrected daughter, a child Sethe had killed in order to save her from enslavement. Beloved, appearing at the age that the unnamed child would have been had she lived, takes her name from the single word Sethe was able to have engraved on the daughter's tombstone. The manifestation of her body in the story has a nominal link to the manifestation of writing on stone, and both the body and the

engraving are, after a fashion, material expressions of familial love. The connection between this second "birth" and writing is even more provocative when one considers the method by which Sethe created the tombstone. Unable to afford the engraving, she was able to buy the single word by having sex with the engraver. By manifesting this word through a sex act, she performs, in her mourning, a conception of the tombstone that darkly mirrors the act by which she conceived the unnamed child herself. Throughout the novel, Beloved's presence is consistently connected to writing and storytelling. Beloved is described as being "hungry" for stories, as if her corporeal body is sustained through linguistic nourishment, and her exit from the novel is framed as an explicitly narrative absence: "It was not a story to pass on" (323).

That exit occurs in the context of a reproduction (i.e. retelling) of the circumstances of the earlier infanticide. Sethe's protective impulse to keep the story from others, even her lover and fellow former-slave Paul D, is reminiscent of her impulse, within that story itself, to protect her daughter from the hands of her former slave-master. Sethe's maternal instinct toward both child and story is intimately tied to her own body as a mother. When hesitating to retell the story, Sethe paces the room, knowing "that the circle she was making around the room, him, the subject, would remain one. That she could never close in, pin it down for anybody who had to ask." The material perimeter her body establishes by this pacing is equated here with the discursive barrier she erects around the story itself, conferring upon the latter some share of the former's physicality. I read this bodily barrier as a means of physically enclosing the narrative of her maternal loss, an enclosure that positions her body as the outer limit of the story, as if she is physically pregnant with that narrative itself.

The consistency with which *Beloved* links storytelling and the pregnancy/birth process is, in one sense, simply a deployment of a centuries-old figuration of literary production as an

analogue for biological procreation. Contemporaneous with the production of *Beloved*, feminist theorist Julia Kristeva makes note of the way that masculine representational economies—from the mysticism of Christianity to the literature of Henry Miller—position themselves as analogues, and eventually replacements, for the female reproductive body ("Stabat Mater" 134). In short, the history of literature is in part the history of male writers using the written word to replace the birth process that their bodies cannot biologically perform. However, the story/birth connection in *Beloved* is a great deal more complicated than that. Storytelling does not replace birth; instead, storytelling and birth appear in tandem in a way that suggests they perform similar operations in structuring the interior life of each character. When Denver, Sethe's other daughter, tells the story of her own birth to Beloved, the two young women co-create a narrative pregnancy. Halfway into the story, Denver reflects:

> This was the part of the story she loved. She was coming to it now, and she loved it because it was all about herself […] Now, watching Beloved's alert and hungry face, how she took in every word, […] her downright craving to know, Denver began to see what she is saying and not just to hear it […] Denver was seeing it now and feeling it—through Beloved. Feeling how it must have felt to her mother. Seeing how it must have looked. And the more fine points she made, the more detail she provided, the more Beloved liked it. So she anticipated the questions by giving blood to the scraps her mother and her grandmother had told her—and a heartbeat. The monologue became, in fact, a duet as they lay down together, Denver nursing Beloved's interest like a lover whose pleasure was to overfeed the loved. (91-92)

Beyond simply being *about* a birth, this birth narrative develops like a pregnancy, a fetus comprised of "blood" and narrative "scraps," finally developing with a "heartbeat," intermingling the physical details of the birth story with the abstract elements of its telling. Even as this "pregnancy" straddles the physical and the narrative, Denver herself straddles a different divide: the one between mother and child. As the storyteller, Denver's role shifts from the baby

being carried in the story to "feeling how it must have felt to her mother." Her creation of the fictional details that complete her partial knowledge of Sethe's point of view positions Denver as the mother of the story itself. Paired with Denver's position as mother is the consistent description of her "nursing" relationship with Beloved, whose "craving" and "hungry" consumption of the narrative makes her resemble a suckling child who feeds on stories. Elsewhere in the novel, Beloved's interest in Sethe's stories similarly uses a metaphor of nourishment: "It became a way to feed her. Just as Denver discovered and relied on the delightful effect sweet things had on Beloved, Sethe learned the profound satisfaction Beloved got from storytelling" (69).

As this scene from *Beloved* shows, the link between birth and storytelling has much broader implications for embodiment as it appears in and through narratives. These implications are themselves necessarily political, since the way that we address the material body *in* and *of* text is always already informed by the hierarchies by which bodies are valuated in the extra-textual world. These politics are central to the examination of corporeality, writing, and the sexual body in contemporaneous feminist theory, including Cixous's discussions of écriture féminine and Irigaray's analysis of the "two lips." Relating the body-text relationship to the specific metaphor of motherhood, Kristeva not only imagines texts and bodies in one another's terms, but performs an extended and unprecedented analysis of the ruptures of the semiotic in poetic texts—moments of the (female, implicitly maternal) body reasserting itself from within the seams of language. Just as her discussion of writing depends on a relationship with the maternal body, her discussion of the maternal body depends on a relationship with writing. One of the most distinctive features of "Stabat Mater" is the way that the material composition of her page is itself implicated in her discussion of maternity. The more straightforwardly theoretical

sections of her essay are periodically interrupted by shorter, more poetic passages on the psychophysical experience of pregnancy and birth that push themselves in at the side of the page, bolded and set apart from the rest of the text. These passages are accommodated by a larger text that shifts to physically wrap around them, housing them like a pregnant belly around an expanding fetus. This literal incorporation of the textual body as part of the argument about pregnancy is reflected in the language of those interrupting passages themselves, enacting and predicting their descriptions of words as themselves material. The first of those passages reads:

> Words always too remote, too abstract to capture the subterranean swarm of seconds, insinuating themselves into unimaginable places. Writing them down tests an argument, as does love. What is love, for a woman, the same thing as writing. Laugh. Impossible. Flash on the unnameable, woven of abstractions to be torn apart. Let a body finally venture out of its shelter, expose itself in meaning beneath a veil of words. WORD FLESH. From one to the other, eternally, fragmented visions, metaphors of the invisible. (1985 133-134)

Here Kristeva criticizes a tendency of language to abstract, though even in this abstraction she emphasizes the way it "necessarily surveys from a very high altitude, allusively." Distance, though it lacks the more obvious materiality of contact, is itself a material property; language, too, is not so much immaterial as it is differently, quietly material. Through the description of the mother, Kristeva imagines a more dramatically physicalized presentation of language. She describes a body that can "finally venture out of its shelter, expose itself in meaning beneath a veil of words," making meaning that works around, through, and in spite of the covering that language overlays it. This description is itself reminiscent of a child issuing forth from an enclosing maternal body. Poetic writing, as Kristeva so often shows, has the capacity to make meaning not simply through language, but at the places where language stretches and breaks, where "abstractions [are] torn apart" and the body slips through again (the body which, at the

same time, is part of that "break"). This passage both describes and enacts those moments of textual rupture and bodily eruption, all while housed in a passage whose visual presentation on the page speaks wordlessly to that same eruption.

It is in fact through a maternal eruption, that *Beloved* as a novel itself emerges. The first few pages of the novel move loosely from one of Sethe's thoughts to another, without making it clear to the reader which of these are memories and which of these will form the present tense of the novel. The following, which begins with Sethe's fading memory of her two missing sons,[5] eventually leads to the event that will begin the novel's central storyline:

> As for the rest, she worked hard to remember as close to nothing as was safe. Unfortunately, her brain was devious. She might be hurrying across a field, running practically, to get to the pump quickly and rinse the chamomile sap from her legs. Nothing else would be in her mind. The picture of the men coming to nurse her was as lifeless as the nerves in her back where the skin buckled like a washboard. […] Then something. The plash of water, the sight of her shoes and stockings awry on the path where she had flung them; or Here Boy lapping in the puddle near her feet, and suddenly there was Sweet Home rolling, rolling out before her eyes, and although there was not a leaf on that farm that did not make her want to scream it rolled itself out before her in shameless beauty. […] It shamed her—remembering the wonderful soughing trees rather than the boys. Try as she might to make it otherwise, the sycamores beat out the children every time and she could not forgive her memory for that.
>
> When the last of the chamomile was gone, she went around to the front of the house, collecting her shoes and stockings on the way. (6-7)

This moment is one in which Sethe's relationship to her traumatic past is put in tension with her ability to function as the mother she wishes to be. The explicit framing of her brain as an

[5] Sethe has given birth to four children. The two eldest, Howard and Bulgar, have run away, and their absence is the subject of the beginning of this passage. The second youngest, the reader later learns, was killed in infancy, and her name is never revealed to us (and the novel suggests that she returns to Sethe in the form of the adult woman, Beloved, whose name is taken from the infant's tombstone). The youngest, Denver, is the only living child still residing with Sethe.

antagonizing character separate from Sethe herself ("her brain was devious") is one that occurs at later points in the novel and which, I argue, link the brain's hunger for Sethe's traumatic memories with a fetus drawing nourishment from a mother's body. This, like Beloved's[6] own hunger for stories, plays with an idea of storytelling as material—in this case, a material that can be consumed by, and can sustain, the body. Especially notable is the way in which this scene begins with a hypothetical scenario ("she *might* be hurrying across a field," emphasis mine) in which her brain would accost her, yet ends with a scene that has shifted out of hypothesis into material fact. It turns out that the chamomile field is an actual experience Sethe has had. Further, it is after Sethe emerges from the field and goes to the front of the house that she sees Paul D, and his appearance in her life initiates the central events of the plot. A hypothetical moment congeals into actuality, a series of loose memories finally deposit us at the start of the story. [7] The metaphorization that figures Sethe's relationship with her brain as a maternal relationship (something loosely implied here, but much clearer as the novel progresses) positions the present tense of the novel as emerging from that relationship. Not only does this continue to link the novel with the birth process, it also locates that birth process, not in Sethe's literal body, but within the materially described interior space of her mind.

Black Maternal Bodies and the Rhetoric of External Investment

In *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History*, Ian Baucom analyzes the rhetoric of the *Zong* case, in which judges determined whether the owners

[6] The character, not the novel, though this line blurs, instructively, at points.
[7] This effect, a congealing of an abstract scenario into a real event, is part of a larger trend that appears throughout the novel. The characters appear always to be under the threat of unexpected materializations, whether it be memories that can physically hurt you or, more dramatically, the manifestation of the word on a tombstone into the body of a nineteen year old woman.

of a British slave ship had the right to file an insurance claim for the "lost cargo" of 133 slaves thrown overboard to drown in 1781. Baucom notes that the loss of the slaves' lives registers in the case, not by virtue of an assumed interior value in the slave, but as a result of the sentiment that was invested—as the emotional equivalent of capital—into the lost bodies: "From this perspective the slaves functioned as tokens for or signs of property by virtue not of the agreement [which contractually conferred upon them a monetary value] but of the sentiment that had been invested in them" (205). The prosecutors of the *Zong* case used the deaths of black people for emotional manipulation, not by virtue of an assumed inherent emotional worth, but through the threatened loss of white emotional investment that defined the black bodies from without. This investment depends upon a model of embodiment in which the black body is assumed to be a mere shell for the emotional or financial investment by white law.

Saidiya Hartman notices a similar trend in the description of slaves, even among self-reported abolitionists. In *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, Hartman analyzes an anti-slavery tract by John Rankin, in which he tries to humanize slaves for a white audience by imagining what it would be like for himself, his wife, and his children to endure the same vicious treatment regularly forced upon black bodies. Hartman points to the way that this act of empathy is premised upon a disturbing figuration of the black body: "By exploiting the vulnerability of the captive body as a vessel for the uses, thoughts, and feelings of others, the humanity extended to the slave inadvertently confirms the expectations and desires definitive of the relations of chattel slavery**.** In other words, the ease of Rankin's empathetic identification is as much due to his good intentions and heartfelt opposition to slavery as to the fungibility of the captive body" (18-19). Hartman points out that the mechanics of slavery figure the black body as vulnerable to white relocation (through

kidnapping), and available for the insertion of white will (through the orders of slavemasters) as well as white bodies (through the rapes economically incentivized in chattel slavery), and that these same figurations of the black body as a vessel to be variously filled by white structuration and desire operates in this abolitionist's insertion of himself into the imagined subjective experience of the violated slave. She refers to this colonizing aspect of empathy as the "violence of identification." Rankin's positioning of the emotional anchor of his tract in interjected white subjects suggests that the black bodies that acted as the sites of his empathetic entrance lacked their own inherent emotional value. It presents, as does chattel slavery, a black body that is empty until filled, that is available for white minds and bodies to occupy. Further, his specific use of his wife and children as part of his imagined scenario emphasizes familial relation as part of the affective value that must be added to the black body, implying that such relations and affect are not within the capacities of that body itself.

This model of embodiment, in which the black body is an empty vessel for white violation/investment, has its roots in Cartesian dualism: the assumption of the mind as separate from the body that houses it. In their introduction to *New Materialisms*, editors Diana Coole and Samantha Frost make explicit the hierarchy that is implied by Descartes' description of matter versus mind: "The corollary of this calculable natural world was not, as one might have expected, a determinism that renders human agency an illusion but a sense of mastery bequeathed to the thinking subject: the *cogito* (I think) that Descartes identified as ontologically other than matter. In distinction from the passivity of matter, modern philosophy has variously portrayed humans as rational, self-aware, free, and self-moving agents" (8). Especially provocative is the unexpected twist they point to in Descartes's logic; that his conception of the *cogito*'s privilege as unattached and self-directing is inconsistent with that *cogito*'s emplacement

in a world whose materialism is so fixed, so effectively deadened and heavy that self-direction in matter's midst would appear impossible. Central to the culturally inherited notion of the unattached mind is a debasement of matter; matter, after a fashion, performs its binary counterpoint to the mind *as a labor* which grants the mind its supposed freedom and *mastery*. As Elizabeth Grosz points out, there is a historical tendency to map other binaries onto this model, and to extrapolate hierarchies from their relation. In the case of the slavery rhetoric, blackness is relegated to the body and whiteness is aligned with the mind—with the abstract valuations that confer and interpret worth.

In American slavery (as well as after emancipation), the black body is conflated with the physical labor it is pressed to perform by the overseeing eye of white law (a system that itself effectively unsees the physical coercion performed by white bodies in the continued operations of day to day slavery). But this binary appears in other, subtler ways. For instance, Uri McMillan analyzes the complicated rhetorics of embodiment, agency, and performance in the use of Joice Heth by P.T. Barnum. Heth, an elderly slave, was fictitiously presented to Barnum's 19th century audiences as the 160-year-old former nursemaid of George Washington. Fascinated white audiences were invited to see and even touch her aged body in order to contact, through that vessel, the abstracted white history it was thought to contain, in a process McMillan refers to as "mammy-memory": "Heth's embodiment of historical change, seemingly held in suspension in the surfaces of her heavily corrugated skin and gnarled limbs, is what multifarious audiences came to witness," and "[a]s a technology, Heth's physicality acted as an embodied portal – for audiences – to travel backwards to mythic narratives of American identity that could no longer be experienced" (36, 42). The horrific treatment to which the enslaved body is physically

subjected is recreated, at the level of metaphor, by its figuration as an empty vessel to be filled, as a means of transportation and containment of white sentiment.

These disturbing descriptions of black embodiment are not remote relics of the past, but constitute a rhetoric against which activists have worked throughout the twentieth century. During the era in which Morrison wrote Beloved, the U.S. (and U.K.) was undergoing a massive neo-conservative movement that replaced the rhetoric of Civil Rights and women's movements with a "values" discourse that shifted blame for social inequity upon the disenfranchised themselves. William Jefferson argues that Morrison's careful framing of the infanticide is not a response to the historical event of Margaret Garner's murder of her child (the inspiring event for the novel), but is a means of guarding African Americans in her own time against the kinds of treatment they received in 1980s political rhetoric. Reading the debates between black conservatives and their critics in particular, Jefferson states, "To be clear: *Beloved* is not a text *influenced* by the emergent black progressive critique of black conservativism inaugurated by [Cornel] West and others; rather, it is *itself* a response to that conservative discourse" (184). That conservative discourse draws on many of the same assumptions of black hypercorporeality, and a corresponding absence of emotional interior, that weave their way through the slavery-era discourse quoted above.

For example, in a 1986 radio address on poverty and government assistance, Ronald Reagan comments, "In inner cities today, families, as we've always thought of them, are not even being formed" (*The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*). Reagan paints the problem of poverty in explicitly familial terms and argues not that single mothers and their children are challenged by economic and racial disenfranchisement, but that they do not exist as families at all. He describes the members of these families as if they did not have any relationships with one

another that qualify as familial bonds. In place of any relational bonds, Reagan implies these imagined families will turn to government assistance to hold together—and even supplant—emotional coherence. He offers a hypothetical scenario in which "a teenage girl who becomes pregnant can make herself eligible for welfare benefits that will set her up in an apartment of her own, provide medical care, and feed and clothe her" only if she does not identify the father. Reagan grammatically isolates the young mother: she "becomes" pregnant without any mention of the father and government assistance is directed toward her alone (not her child, whose relationship to her is absent from the speech). In the absence of a marriage with the child's biological father, Reagan suggests, the young mother will have no legible relational bonds of any kind, and will be tempted to replace those sentimental attachments by absorbing herself into the structuring apparatus of the state. Indeed, one of only two instances in which active verbs are attached to the mother anywhere in this speech are in this sentence in which she "makes herself eligible," sacrificing her already illegible family to manipulate the social safety net, making her "eligible" for a marriage with the state.[8] Reagan makes this substitution explicit when suggesting that "the most insidious effect of welfare is its usurpation of the role of provider."

While Reagan pauses in this speech to identify these mothers as "both white and black," his pretense of describing these mothers in racially neutral terms is disingenuous at best. Frequent references to the "inner city" and other racially coded attributes support the pervasive reading of his comments as aimed toward black women, in much the same way that the race of Linda Taylor in his famous "welfare queen" speech is never named, but is always already

[8] The other active verb attached to the mother is similarly functions to replace traditional family with a state-supported one: "In other words, it can pay for her to quit work." Throughout the rest of the speech, the mother is only ever the direct object or unattached grammatical outlier, never engaging her children or their father, but trapped in "deepening cycle of futility, hopelessness, and despair" due to "all the responsibilities of grownups thrust upon [her]." This paints a portrait of single mothers who are either helpless children or nefarious manipulators.

known. In *Reproducing Race: An Ethnography of Pregnancy as a Site of Racialization*, Khiara Bridges writes "The always already Blackness of the undeserving poor accounts for the persistence of the discursive construction of the welfare queen as Black—this is in spite of the fact that Black women do not make up a majority of welfare recipients" (220). Bridges points out that popular perception of single mothers on government assistance shifted from "deserving" to "undeserving" in parallel with the perceived changes in demographics of welfare recipients between the 1930s and 1960s. She argues that Reagan's description of mothers on welfare drew from and mobilized a rhetoric based on the assumed race of these mothers and the cultural qualities with which they were stereotyped, and she cites Angela Onwuachi-Willig "Racist assumptions have turned public opinion and policy against providing the American poor with welfare benefits as the image of its primary beneficiaries changed from deserving, chaste white widows to lazy, never-married black baby-makers" (215). Not only is Reagan's welfare mother implicitly black, it is her perceived blackness that facilitates her mobilization as a figure for a morally empty and perpetually duplicitous recipient population.

Reagan's focus on the mother in these speeches demonstrates not just the conservative devaluation of the bodies of African Americans (as well as a denial of their interior emotional life, as shown in the absence of descriptions of familial bonds), but the specific invocation of black *maternal* bodies as hollow containers. In her discussion of the treatment of black pregnant women, Bridges connects the historical exploitation of these women in torturous gynecological and obstetrical experiments to the modern day discrepancies in infant and maternal mortality for black women, pointing to a pervasive mythology about the black pregnant body undergirding both. Drawing on the work of John Hoberman, Bridges points to the problematic myth of "obstetrical hardiness" in black women: a belief that the "simplicity" and "primitivism" of the

black body makes it less susceptible to pain and injury, making it a better instrument for the birth process. Bridges describes the physiological traits attributed to the black pregnant body:

> the Black 'primitive pelvis,' which was thought to be narrower and deeper than the presumably more 'civilized' pelvises of white women, and invariably enabled a complication-free passage of the infant during birth; the absence among Black women of endometriosis, which was thought to be a 'twentieth century disease' that only affected 'civilized persons within modernity; and the lessened sensitivity of Black women's vaginal tissues, which was thought to make Black women immune from injuries occasioned during birth. (117-118)

The myth of "obstetrical hardiness" reinforces a figuration of black women's bodies as vessels in multiple ways. First, the myth suggests that black women are imbued via their "primitive" status with a kind of hypercorporeality, a suitability to the birthing process due to their status as more bodily than their white counterparts, whose comparative "civilization" has at least partially refigured them as more cultured, more of-the-mind. Black women are, in short, presumed to be built as better bodily containers, a myth built upon the broader assumptions of black hypercorporeality. Second, this myth suggests a simultaneous disconnection between that body and the child that issues from it. The idea that black women's vaginal tissues are somehow less vulnerable contributes to a description of the birth process in which the baby can be born without leaving any mark that it was ever there. The mother's body, while built to hold the baby, is not imagined as having involvement in the birth process itself, even through injury.[9] This works in complement with other myths about black female sexuality and motherhood. When combined with stereotypes of black women as hypersexual and as neglectful, disinterested parents—a stereotype exacerbated by the welfare queen myth, as it suggests black women callously produce

[9] "Obstetrical hardiness" includes the dangerous myth that black women are less sensitive to pain in childbirth. This contributes to the figuration of their bodies as unaffected by, and thus disconnected from, the birth process. Bridges points to the disastrous effects this myth has had on patient care, past and present (117-119).

unloved children solely as a prop to manipulate their way into government-funded largesse—this myth contributes to a figuration of the black body as a mere vessel, a kind of revolving door for sexual entrances and birthed exits with whom their relationship is as automatic as it is disconnected.

To some extent, this is part of the rhetoric of all pregnant bodies, regardless of race, though even the descriptions of white women's pregnant bodies as vessels have positive, sentimental valuations absent from the descriptions of black women above. Kristeva argues in "Stabat Mater" that the Virgin Mary is herself bound by her construction as the vessel for the divine birth, so that her body houses a miracle from which she is then immediately expelled, in order to ensure a more direct patrilineal tie between Jesus and God: "On the rare occasions when the Mother of Jesus does appear in the Gospels, it is in order to signify the fact that the filial bond has to do not with the flesh but with the name; in other words, any trace of matrilinearity is explicitly disavowed, leaving only the symbolic tie between mother and son" (1985 136). This presumed lack of maternal connection appears, in a far more frightening form, in the rhetoric surrounding black motherhood. In part, this is because the exploitation of that rhetoric played a powerful role in the economic underpinnings of that rhetoric: if black women were seen as disconnected from their children, their children were solely the property of the mother's masters—men who were financially rewarded for raping these women and creating through them more capital in the form of the bodies of black children.

In an interview about her motivation for writing a neo-slave narrative, Toni Morrison invokes the metaphor of the black body as a vessel. In a 1993 interview with Paul Gilroy, commenting on the lack of narratives about slavery until the final decades of the twentieth century, Morrison states:

> Slavery wasn't in the literature at all. Part of it, I think, is because, on moving from bondage to freedom which has been our goal, we got away from slavery and also from the slaves[;] there's a difference. We have to re-inhabit those people. (Keizer 22)

Morrison's comments track the relationship between the individual bodies and selves of black people and the institution of slavery that purported to give them meaning. She notes that in attempting to get away from slavery as an institution, and as a period of United States history, modern day African Americans mistakenly conflated the practices of slavery from which they wanted to divorce themselves with the bodies of the slaves those practices were inflicted upon: "we got away from slavery and also from slaves[;] there's a difference." To ignore the difference, to conflate the slave with slavery is to treat their bodies and selves as lost, to confer upon slaves the very emptiness upon which their exploitation was justified. The conflation assumes as given what is in fact the product of state violence. And yet, her advice appears, at least at first, to reinstate the slave body as a vessel for occupation from without: "We have to re-inhabit those people." How is it that Morrison is able to invoke the slave body/self as a site for occupation, even while calling for a separation of the slave from the system that similarly overtook their bodies and assumed a right to occupy them? The next section will engage the interwoven presentations of black maternity, subjectivity, and embodiment in Morrison's novel, tracing the ways in which they both reenact and revise late twentieth century rhetoric (and the slavery-era rhetoric from which it descends) of emptiness, enclosure, and agency.

Opening the Cage: Blackness, Maternity, and Self-Relation

In the years after his time at Sweet Home—the plantation where he first met Sethe—Paul D was placed on a chain gang. The descriptions of his body implicitly compare the corporeal

form that houses him with the cage he is deposited in at night. His confinement to the cage emphasizes his relationship to his body as an enclosing exterior, in which he "began to tremble":

> Still no one else knew it, because it began inside. A flutter of a kind, in the chest, then the shoulder blades. It felt like rippling—gentle at first and then wild. As though the further south they led him the more his blood, frozen like an ice pond for twenty years, began thawing, breaking into pieces that, once melted, had no choice but to swirl and eddy. Sometimes it was in his leg. Then again it moved to the base of his spine. By the time they unhitched him from the wagon and he saw nothing but dogs and two shacks in a world of sizzling grass, the roiling blood was shaking him two and fro. But no one could tell. The wrists he held out for the bracelets that evening were steady as the legs he stood on when chains were attached to the leg irons. But when they shoved him into the box and dropped the cage door down, his hands quit taking instruction. On their own they traveled. Nothing could stop them or get their attention. They would not hold his penis to urinate or a spoon to scoop lumps of lima beans into his mouth. The miracle of their obedience came with the hammer at dawn. (125-126)

The oscillation between Paul D's obedient body and his uncontrollable body is marked by his movement in and out of his cage. While architecturally contained at night, his body no longer responds to any commands, not even his own. However, when he is chained and put to work during the day, his body obeys the commands of his masters. This implies that his body has been so wholly integrated into the structure of slavery that it acts as its own kind of cage, performing at daytime the kinds of containment that the literal cage provides at night. He is trapped inside a body that has been trapped by his captors. This conscription to a bodily cage is emphasized by the structure of the narrative itself; this is the only chapter, in a novel otherwise woven through with analepsis, that is entirely self-contained within a single time setting, creating temporal and narrative enclosures that house this period of his life. His body only begins to resist, to pull towards freedom, when that containment is externalized (in the form of the cage). This reuses elements of the figuration of the black body as vessel, by emphasizing its function as container,

yet interrupts that figuration through the portrayal of both the subjectivity contained in that body and that body's own unwillingness to fully abandon itself to the structure slavery has forced upon it.

Beloved's simultaneous use and revision of the trope of the enslaved body as a container draws heavily from the language of the maternal body. Yet this figuration does not depend upon the literal pregnancy of the characters in these individual scenes—instead, maternity becomes a way of thinking through bodily containment, in ways that depart from the containment assumed/demanded of the enslaved body. Living in Sethe's home after years apart, Paul D finds his relationship with Sethe changing after Beloved arrives. He begins to be expelled, first from Sethe's bedroom, then from the main quarters of the house, by a supernatural force Beloved exerts upon him. Eventually, she visits him at night, and compels him, through the same unspoken force, to have sex with her.[10] The force she exerts upon his body resembles, in some ways, the structuring forces of slavery itself, which in the passage above repurposed his body in ways that he struggled to resist. Here, however, his physical relationship with Beloved is articulated through a metaphor of bodily containment borrowing from maternity rather than slavery. He is described as having an old tobacco tin in his chest, rusted shut and preventing access to the heart housed inside. This metaphor already has elements of maternity in it; the tenderness of the heart within the enclosing structure of the tin echoes the fragility of a growing fetus within the womb. The metaphor is put in more explicitly feminizing terms as Paul D struggles to resist Beloved's advances, he fears: "[trembling] like Lot's wife and [feeling] some

[10] The extent to which the force she exerts on Paul D is literal or imagined, the product of supernatural power or simply his own rationalization, is ambiguous. While it remains beyond the scope of this chapter to analyze this scene in further detail, I feel obligated to make clear that, however it appears, a narrative in which a teenage girl "forces" an adult man to have sex with her is politically problematic (even if we read this as a projection on Paul D's part, it is with him that the pathos of the scene remains).

womanish need" (137). The more fully the metaphor of pregnancy creeps into this description, the greater access he has to his heart. The door to the tobacco tin finally swings open when he sexually enters Beloved, creating a strange moment of dual penetration as his penis goes into her body and his emotions cross the femininized threshold of the rusted tin. What is more, pregnancy, as a metaphor, fully takes over the description of his relationship with his heart in the same act that literally impregnates Beloved. While the scene in which this metaphor appears is by no means positively valued within the text itself, the metaphor of pregnancy is one that grants Paul D an access to emotion and self-reflection that was not available to him in previous scenes. Replacing the compartmentalization that barred him from ownership of his body as a slave is a different metaphor of containment—rooted in pregnancy—that allows a more fluid relationship between his body and his heart.

Pregnancy, and maternity more broadly, appears in metaphors of self-relation throughout the text. For example, when told years later that a beating she received at the hands of her slavemaster's nephews was witnessed by her then-husband, Sethe experiences an intense flashback, during which the relationship between the traumatic memories and Sethe herself is metaphorized through maternity. This continues a figuration hinted at in the novel's opening pages (discussed above), developing the metaphorical separation between Sethe and her own brain (that ushered us into the beginning of the novel) into a fully articulated maternal relationship. Her brain is compared to a "greedy child" that consumes memories, like a fetus drawing nourishment from a womb or an infant nursing at the breast—provocative metaphors, since Sethe is both pregnant and nursing in the literal beating scene.

This metaphor is presented with considerable ambivalence, since the most traumatizing part of the beating is when the two nephews forcibly suck Sethe's breasts in order to steal her

milk, both performing and perverting the mother-child relationship that her lactation symbolizes. As Sethe struggles not to let her brain consume (and subject her to) these memories, she sometimes resists the memory and sometimes re-experiences it, and this oscillation is punctuated by the changes in the maternal metaphor.

> She shook her head from side to side, resigned to her rebellious brain. Why was there nothing it refused? No misery, no regret, no hateful picture too rotten to accept? Like a greedy child it snatched up everything. Just once, could it say, No thank you? I just ate and can't hold another bite? I am full God damn it of two boys with mossy teeth, one sucking on my breast the other holding me down, their book-reading teacher watching and writing it up. I am still full of that, God damn it, I can't go back and add more. Add my husband to it, watching, above me in the loft—hiding close by—the one place he thought no one could look for him, looking down on what I couldn't look at at all. And not stopping them—looking and letting it happen. But my greedy brain says, Oh thanks, I'd love more—so I add more. (82-83)

This passage opens with a simple third-person narration, but once her brain is introduced as a "character" separate from Sethe the narration slips seamlessly into free indirect discourse. The voice of this free indirect section is at first Sethe's, but as Sethe discusses her brain the narrating voice takes on attributes of the "brain" itself, forming a second, embedded instance of free indirect discourse. As the memory progresses, we oscillate between three different "voices," each of which signals a different relationship with the trauma: 1) present-day Sethe resisting the memory ("Why was there nothing it refused?"), 2) Sethe's "brain" engaging the memory ("Just once, could it say, No thank you? *I just ate and can't hold another bite?*" emphasis mine[11]), and 3) past-tense Sethe actively reliving the memory ("I am full God damn it of two boys with mossy

[11] This begins as Sethe describing what she would like the brain to say, but as the passage progresses this hypothetical speech becomes its own free indirect. I have italicized the section where I believe that change occurs.

teeth, one sucking on *my breast the other holding me down*" emphasis mine[12]). Not only is this a notable representation of the subtle shifts in a dissociative flashback—wherein the survivor slips from describing a trauma to re-experiencing it—it also presents an oscillation between the pregnant body as a loose analogue for Sethe's psychic state and the pregnant body as a physical site Sethe mentally occupies and which is trapped in place by the two nephews. When the pregnant body simply works as a metaphor for the self-relation by which present-day Sethe encounters her memories, Sethe is able to maintain some measure of interior distance; the mother/child distinction between "Sethe" and "her brain" lets her safely deal with the memory as abstract. When the lines separating Sethe and her brain are collapsed, signaled by change in narrating voice, Sethe shifts from remembering the attack to re-experiencing it, and the pregnancy that had been a metaphor is one directly experienced through the relived beating. And by reliving that beating, she experiences both the loss (in the present tense) of the pregnancy metaphor that kept her psychologically safe, and the violation (in the past tense) of her literal maternal relationships (to both her fetus and her infant daughter) when the milk that fed those relationships was taken from her.

The function of the maternal body in metaphors of self-relation depends upon a very specific figuration of pregnancy, one reflected in contemporaneous theoretical treatments. In her study on the feminist application of the pregnancy metaphor, Drucilla Cornell argues that Lacanian descriptions of maternity undo the complexity that feminist poststructuralist writing grants to the mother-child relationship:

> In its place is the imagined unity of mother and child, expressed within the symbolic as the fantasy projection of the masculine imaginary. Feminine writing, on the other hand, evokes not the

[12] This begins in the voice of Sethe's brain, but as the episode gets more detailed the first person aligns more and more completely with the beaten, pregnant Sethe, until the line between remembering and reliving is indistinguishable and Seth *becomes* her former self. I have italicized here I believe that change occurs.

> unity of mother and child, but the heterogeneity within the subject herself and the tie that indicates *both* separation and connection in the mother/daughter relation, without denying the value of identification between women as women that could be at its base. This writing, whether of the maternal body or of maternity as a relation between generations of women, emphasizes the otherness of the child, even of the female child, which belies the illusion of symbiosis as the lost paradise. The pregnant body has an other within that is non-identical to herself. (22; italics in original)

Pregnancy is here imagined as structured upon interior difference, a mother and fetus whose connection is undeniable, but whose non-identicality prevents that relationship from ever collapsing into oneness.[13] Reading this alongside Sethe's beating, the distancing function of the narrative voice operates through a pregnancy metaphor that allows the fetus (and, by extension, Sethe's traumatic memory) to function as "an other within that is nonidentical to herself." Cornell explicitly contrasts her description of an internally divided, heterogeneous pregnancy with the masculinist perspective that effectively undoes the mother-child relationship by presenting these two players as fused in an undifferentiable unity, lacking the intra-distinction that makes relation possible.[14] In Sethe's memory, the moments in which the narrating voice no longer functions to separate Sethe from her brain-as-fetus are the moments in which she most fully and traumatically relives the violence. The heterogeneous model of pregnancy described by Cornell, after other feminist poststructuralists, is what allows pregnancy to work as a protective metaphor for self-relation in Morrison's text. Sethe is able to cope with the memory when she relates to herself across an interior division that makes self-confrontation safe, that keeps her from being conflated with her own trauma. Implicit here is a presentation of subjectivity itself as

[13] Jessica Benjamin's *Bonds of Love* explores the unity/separation question as it relates more directly to psychoanalytic treatments of the mother-child relationship.

[14] See Freud's 1914 essay, "On Narcissism," in which he claims that maternal love is itself a form of narcissism: "In the child to whom they give birth, a part of their own body comes to them as an object other than themselves, upon which they can lavish out of their narcissism complete object love." (47)

built upon a foundational interior division across which the subject relates to herself as other, what Kaja Silverman would call "identity-at-a-distance" (1996). The metaphor of pregnancy, as a state of simultaneous connection and difference, provides a bodily model for that interior psychological process.

However, the pull to imagine the pregnant body through union rather than relation-enabling division is strong, and operates in parallel with a model of subjectivity as autonomous and unitary (rather than the internally divided one favored by late twentieth century theorists). Kristeva, for example discusses the ways in which the use of Mother as a symbol binds into coherence the internal heterogeneity of the pregnant body itself, erasing the very operations of the body it purports to represent. From "Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini":

> And yet, if we presume that someone exists throughout the process of cells, molecules, and atoms accumulating, dividing, and multiplying without any identity (biological or socio-symbolical) having been formed so far, are we not positing an animism that reflects the inherent psychosis of the speaking Being? So, if we suppose that a mother is the subject of gestation, in other words the master of a process that science, despite its effective devices, acknowledges it cannot now and perhaps never will be able to take away from her; if we suppose her to be master of a process that is prior to the social-symbolic-linguistic contract of the group, then we acknowledge the risk of losing identity at the same time as we ward it off. We recognize on the one hand that biology jolts us by means of unsymbolized instinctual drives and that this phenomenon eludes social desire. On the other hand, we immediately deny it; we say there can be no escape, for mamma is there, she embodies this phenomenon; she warrants that everything is, and that it is representable. In a double-barreled move, psychotic tendencies are acknowledged, but at the same time they are settled, quieted, and bestowed upon the mother in order to maintain this ultimate guarantee: symbolic coherence. (238)

Here the complexities of self-relation, that powerful yet terrifying "inherent psychosis," as well as the ineluctable modality of the pregnant body itself, are erased under the work of the Mother as a cultural symbol, one inextricable from the patriarchy that informs the making of all symbols.

This passage makes it clear that the maternal metaphor within the symbolic world is one that works against the maternal body and the subject born there. Irigaray makes a similar point: "The feminine, the maternal are instantly frozen by the 'like,' the 'as if' of that masculine representation dominated by truth, light, resemblance, identity. […] The maternal, the feminine serve (only) to keep up the reproduction-production of doubles, copies, fakes, *while any hint of their material elements*, is turned into scenery to make the show more realistic" (*Speculum of the Other Woman* 265, emphasis mine). In her classic critique of phallogocentrism, Irigaray identifies a masculine economy of representation in which the materiality of the female body, as well much of the charge of maternity as a metaphor, is erased in its appropriation as part of the machinery of language. For *Beloved* to use the metaphor of pregnancy to describe the interior of the subject is feminist in multiple ways: through its blurring of the dualism that would separate the pregnant body from the interior mind it is here used to describe, through its accommodation of a heterogeneity that recognizes the relationship and distinction between mother and fetus, and through its challenge to the relegation of the maternal body to either "mere" material or to the constrictions placed on it by its more conventional metaphorization.

In addition to their position with relation to post-structuralist feminist constructions of the body, *Beloved*'s use of the maternal metaphor has powerful implications for the novel's specific status as a neo-slave narrative and its exploration of black embodiment. Most obviously, it addresses slavery's legacy of ripping apart families, disregarding the bonds of parents and children and instead treating black women as chattel to be forcibly impregnated with children that symbolize, not black family, but white property. In that context, to reinstate the maternal body within the interior of the self, where it is not vulnerable to the same abuses but instead is vital to emotional survival, is a powerful storytelling choice. It suggests, in a way, that those

familial bonds are not lost, because they bridge the subject's emotional interior with the physical bodies of the separated family members. *Beloved* itself makes such an argument; one of the first instances of Sethe's storytelling takes us, through her fetus-like brain, into a memory that is partially unvoiced to the listening Beloved. That memory, of Sethe's own mother, as well as Nan, the woman who nursed Sethe, return to her mind, their remembered words becoming available despite having been spoken to Sethe in the forgotten language of her family's origin. Sethe remembers the mark on her mother's breast that she used to recognize her, remembers Nan's story of how Sethe was the only of her mother's children that survived the middle passage, the others having been thrown overboard because they were fathered through rape by white masters. The placement of the maternal metaphor in the interior of Sethe's subjectivity leads us to a powerful set of memories that reaffirm her lost familial connections, and that disavow, dramatically,[15] the relegation of the black body to the mere containment and transmission of white language, white violence, white children.

Additionally, within the mind, the pregnant body suggests a stronger connection not only to lineage, but also to self. Arlene R. Keizer points to the role of slavery in the imagination of post-Civil Rights self-fashioning:

> Rather than using representations of slavery primarily to protest past and present oppression—this is how slavery had figured in most African American and Caribbean works up through the early 1960s—black writers have begun to represent slavery in order to explore the process of *self-creation* under extremely oppressive conditions. (11 emphasis mine)

[15] It is difficult to resist making evaluative statements about Sethe's mother's choice to kill the children she did not choose to bear, particularly in comparison with Sethe's own choice to kill her much-loved daughter to protect her from enslavement. For the moment, I focus only on the way these choices reflect the figuration of the black maternal body, with an acknowledgment that such a discussion is necessarily incomplete without a further reckoning of the affective impact of these tragic maternal moments.

Slavery's horrors include a lack of social legibility, the condition of not being recognized as a human being by other human beings (including, at times, oneself). Escape from slavery, then, marries ownership of one's own body with a re-emergence into the world as a legible being. In this way, escape constitutes a second birth. In *Beloved,* Sethe's process of escape is punctuated by the birth of her daughter, Denver. Laboring in the river she is crossing on her way to freedom, Sethe straddles the borders that separate shore from shore, pregnancy from birth, slavery from freedom.

I mentioned earlier in this chapter that Morrison uses the curious metaphor of "reinhabit[ing] those people" in her discussion of slavery, which bears an unsettling resemblance to rhetorical descriptions, contemporaneous and historical, of black bodies as empty and available for occupation, and of black families as without relational bonds. The pregnant body offers one way to imagine a kind of inhabitation that does not posit the black body as a vessel for an invading whiteness, but rather presents an inhabitation premised on inter-relation, embodied interdependency, and mutually constituted interiority. The interplay between mother and fetus is conferred by this metaphor upon the presentation of black psychological interiority, making the argument for the recognition of that interiority as present, as complex, as not available for white colonization. Within this maternal metaphor for interior subjectivity, the pregnant body still functions as a container, but a container that both holds and facilitates the interior life of black subjects. In the next section, I will examine more closely the fluidity attributed to that body, and how this impacts both the presentation of black subjects in Morrison's text and offers new points of entry for the analysis of specifically *literary* subjects.

The Compass of the Body and the Edges of Narrative

As I discussed above, pregnancy in *Beloved* is a metaphor used not just for the subjectivity of mothers, but of other characters who are not (and, in Paul D's case, could never be) pregnant. This lack of correspondence between the bodies of characters and the bodies governing the metaphors of their internality puts pressure on the boundaries of corporeality. Literary bodies have qualities that diverge in ways from the properties of material bodies, yet, in other respects, they emphasize the discontinuities already present in our understanding of bodies in the physical world. Most dramatically, as bodies comprised of ideas, as bodies manifested in language, these literary bodies highlight the gaps which already exist between the material fact of the body and our idea of the body. Writing on the phenomenon of the phantom limb, in which the idea of the body eclipses the physical reality of a lost limb, Grosz (invoking Paul Shilder), notes: "The body image is derived to a large extent from the perceptions, sensations, and movements of the organic body, yet sensation alone is not adequate to build up the body image or to explain its characteristics and attributes. There are psychical and fantasmatic dimensions which also need to be accounted for if the body image is to be explained in the depth and detail it requires" (1994 74). Kaja Silverman, after Henri Wallon, refers to this kind of body image as the "proprioceptive ego," a term she uses delicately, since she sees the distinction between it and the literal, sensational body as being impossible to fully maintain. Rather than maintain such a distinction between the idea of the body and its antecedent in the body as corporeal matter, Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter* turns this relationship on its head, arguing that culture does not simply impact how we view the body, but that the body as we experience it is itself only legible to us through cultural discourse, to such an extent that the material body itself is actually a discursive product, not a prediscursive fact. New materialist writings move in the opposite

direction, casting this entire scene of bodily self-description in terms of matter itself, a matter whose agency, vibrancy, and multilayered intra-relation both revises Cartesian figurations of matter as passive and, it would seem, accommodates an analysis of the same gaps between proprioceptive and physiological bodies, albeit in radically different terms.

The blurring of the question of embodiment powerfully impacts descriptions of Sethe's motherhood. Even though her literal physical body has reverted to its pre-pregnancy state, the novel suggests that she still, in some way, continues to encompass her children, as if her love for them involves a total incorporation of them into her character interior, into the *idea* of her body. It is exactly this quality that critic Jean Wyatt (among others) takes to task in her reading of *Beloved*. Wyatt argues that "Sethe defines herself as a maternal body whose connection to its offspring remains unbroken, and that self-definition includes Denver [and her other children] within the compass of the maternal body" (68).[16] It is as if the physical expansion of the literal pregnant body is accompanied by, and eventually succeeded by, a spatialized expansion that pushes the boundaries of her character beyond vessel of her physical body. Wyatt connects this to the infanticide that dominates the novel's backstory, in which Sethe kills her infant daughter to prevent her from being enslaved: "her maternal identification is so complete that it allows Sethe to take the life of her baby because she believes that child to be 'part of her' still," citing the

[16] Other critics join Wyatt in her critique of the relationship between personal identity and maternity in *Beloved*. Stephanie A. Demetrakopolous is especially notable in her critique of maternity, attempting to rewrite this often sentimentalized category with greater attention to the personal difficulties it may entail. Her treatment of biological maternity at times borders on contempt, as she provocatively claims, referring to Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, "The teenage mother often never really enters human history: She is erased before pubescent consciousness dawns enough to solidify her sense of self. Her own biology sucks/swamps her psyche into the undifferentiated morass of Nature" (51). Hanna Reinikainen emphasizes that Sethe must re-gather her pieces (implicitly, to unify them) and heal herself without reliance on "her children or herself as a maternal entity (101). These comments invoke, even while critiquing, a figuration of the maternal body as hyper-corporeal, as bound to a passive and ultimately denigrating materiality, one that works against the interest of an ideal, implicitly unitary subjectivity.

moment in which Sethe thinks of her children as "all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful" (Wyatt 68, Morrison 192).

Though I agree with Wyatt's assertion that Sethe's relationship with her children is metaphorized as if she were still pregnant with them, the analysis she develops from this observation implies a version of the pregnant body that I don't believe to be in accordance with the way the novel generally portrays pregnancy. Wyatt writes:

> During the journey, Sethe experienced her own existence only in relation to her children's survival, 'concerned' not for her self but 'for the life of her children's mother.' She thought 'I believe this baby's ma'am is gonna die' and pictured herself as 'a crawling graveyard for a six-month baby's last hours' (68)

When Sethe conceives of herself as a mother in these moments, she does so by describing that mother in the third person. Though Wyatt reads these references to her "children's mother" (36) and her "baby's ma'am" (37) as signs that Sethe has traded her subjective autonomy for her maternal role, Sethe's use of the third-person invokes her baby's mother *as if that woman is not her*. She signals her simultaneous separation from and connection to those parts of herself that she characterizes as maternal, just as, during the beating scene, a maternal metaphor governed the separation between her and her own brain. These are all moments of self-confrontation that use the heterogeneity of the pregnant body as their metaphor, because that heterogeneity grants characters the ability to see themselves at a distance. Even the "crawling graveyard," Sethe's most complete identification with her own maternal body, is in fact offered by Morrison as a *counter-example* for how Sethe sees herself. The full sentence in Morrison's text from which Wyatt's quote is taken actually reads as follows: "It was the voice full of velvet and Boston and good things to eat that urged her along and made her think that *maybe she wasn't*, after all, just a

crawling graveyard for a six-month baby's last hours" (Morrison 41-42; emphasis mine).

Rather than reading the infanticide as an act of ultimate maternal incorporation on Sethe's part, in which she treats her child as if she had no life outside of Sethe's body, I see a more complicated relationship between pregnancy, selfhood, and narrative operating in this scene. It is referred to with varying levels of detail throughout the text, but its most complete iteration is as follows:

> Simple: she was squatting in the garden and when she saw them coming and recognized schoolteacher's hat, she heard wings. Little hummingbirds stuck their needle beaks right through her headcloth into her hair and beat their wings. And if she thought anything it was No. No. Nono. Nonono. Simple. She just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them. Over there. Outside this place, where they would be safe. (192)

Suspending, for only a moment, the fact of the murder, Sethe's description of this moment frames it as a birth rather than a death. In a garden, itself evocative of fertility, Sethe is squatting, as if in labor. She "carrie[s]" her children, like a pregnant mother carries a baby, then "pushe[s]" her child "through the veil" as if pushing her through the birth canal and out of the body. Her constant, frantic need to get her children "out" is not consistent with her literal movement, by which she takes her children *into* the shed to kill them, but rather speaks to the experience of moving a child out of her body. Her panic at the thought of her children's enslavement is also a panic of embodiment; she needs to get them out of the body, but her pregnant body metaphorically reaches everywhere, and in a moment of crisis she births one of them out of the material world—and, for a moment, out of the novel—entirely.

This same need to move her children "out" of an encompassing and inescapable space appears in an earlier scene, in which Sethe fears that visiting the physical site of her slavery will trap her children in a kind of exteriorized consciousness that uses the entire landscape as its entrapping body. Speaking to Denver, she offers a hypothetical scenario: "'Someday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it's you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It's when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else" (43). What Sethe voices here is an unsettling alternative to the maternal metaphor that has been used to describe self-relation in the novel. In contrast with the interplay between Sethe and her own brain, two distinct but undeniably connected entities within the same subjective interior, she imagines the "thought" picture coming from an entirely disconnected mental interloper. In some respects, this thought picture is invading from without, reproducing the kind of bodily and subjective invasions that the maternal metaphor elsewhere guards against; like the slavemaster who "invests" in the vessel of the black body, this unwanted thought enters from a space beyond the subject. Sethe goes on to warn against the nightmarish implications of this invading thought picture, describing an entire landscape that will assert itself upon Denver should she ever visit Sweet Home, and an entire history that "will happen again," an enslavement that "will be there for you, waiting for you" (44). The protective features of the maternal body, both in its material and metaphorical forms, are pitted against a different kind of encompassing landscape, one Sethe is unwilling to match herself against: "'So, Denver, you can't never go there. Never. Because even though it's all over—over and done with—it's going to always be there waiting for you. That's how come I had to get all my children out, no matter what'" (44). The shift from a hypothetical present tense into a definitive past tense ("I had to get all my children out") gestures both to Sethe's choice to get her children away from the plantation

as well as her choice to kill one child rather than give her over when the slavemaster found Sethe's family. The shift from hypothetical to literal, coupled with the threat of this reemerging landscape, this invading "picture," also echoes the beginning of the novel itself, in which Sethe's hypothetical stroll through the chamomile congeals into the literal events of the story's present tense—navigating, en route, the return of a post-traumatic memory of the Sweet Home landscape.

The reader confronts two metaphorical bodies. The first, which Sethe describes to Denver, is an entrapping landscape whose material determinism is coupled with the threat of psychic invasion that treats the embodied subject as a vessel for entrance. The second, which dominates the novel, is a flexible and protective maternal body that stretches to fit already born children in its compass and, within the subject's interior, facilitates a self-relation that reclaims as present that subject's self-ownership. The novel itself issues from the second metaphorical body, suggesting that, in some way, the maternal body houses the entire text, that the discourse itself operates through the same simultaneous enclosure and enclosing that appears in the descriptions of individual characters. This is consistent with frequent links made between maternity and storytelling, discussed at the opening of this chapter.

What is the practical effect of this linkage between discourse and body for the description of literary subjectivity and the status of the material body within textual worlds? As I discussed in the introduction, Alex Woloch describes of both the body and the novel's discourse as external barriers that enclose the character's interior, though he doesn't explicitly thematize the connection between body and text that I argue for here. *Beloved* belongs to a time and a genre radically different from the one around which Woloch builds his analysis, yet his figuration (intentional or not) of the restraining text/body offers a useful counterpoint to the way that

Beloved's bodily textuality operates. Whereas the characters Woloch analyzes compete for space, Morrison's occupy overlapping spaces within a set of fluid articulations of enclosure and release, pregnancy and birth. Whereas the characters Woloch analyzes have a unitary subjectivity that exists just beyond the storyworld and which must struggle to be even partially inflected in the novel's discourse (13), *Beloved*'s characters are internally divided, and their self-relation is voiced as a maternally-inflected interplay that operates through, rather than in spite of, an enclosing body. As its own kind of body, the full corpus of the text itself is implicated in these shifting and changing interactions.

In its historical moment, *Beloved* is a protective space for black subjectivity, an enclosing body for an entire history that is threatened with continual cultural hollowing out. I argue that Morrison's *Beloved* uses the metaphor of the maternal body as a way of depicting the power and challenge of sustaining subjectivity through enclosure and containment, without relegating the black maternal bodies in her text to the status of objects for white use. In so doing, Morrison's text intervenes in two separate (yet similarly constructed) models of embodiment, torqueing the metaphors of *bondage* to make them instead express the *bonds* of family, finding a fullness of self where emptiness had been (and continued to be) assumed. In Chapter Two, I'll be building on the relationship between self-relation, embodiment, interiority, and heterogeneity, discussing a very different model of embodiment, one characterized by a much more antagonistic intervention of subjects into one another's "character-space," which manifests in both figural and literal violation and violence.

CHAPTER TWO

"SPIT AT ALL MIRRORS WHICH CONTROL": COPIED BODIES, COPIED TEXT, AND THE CHARACTER OF RAPE IN *NEUROMANCER* AND *EMPIRE OF THE SENSELESS*

> It took a month for the gestalt of drugs and tension he moved through to turn those perpetually startled eyes into wells of reflexive need. He'd watched her personality fragment, calving like an iceberg, splinters drifting away, and finally he'd seen the raw need, the hungry armature of addiction.
>
> William Gibson, *Neuromancer*

> I didn't bother telling her the particular dreams because she was just a fuck. Instead I watched her personality fragment, over a period of time, calving like an iceberg or space, splinters of identity drifting away, until finally I saw her raw need, obsession which is addiction. I was scared. I wanted to run away.
>
> Kathy Acker, *Empire of the Senseless*

The House I Live In: Copies, Spaces, and Women's Bodies

In a 1983 print ad for Lean Cuisine, a slender woman in a maroon leotard and white legwarmers leans her body against a mirror that runs the length of the entire wall of the room she stands in, creating the visual effect of not one but two women, leaning against one another (figure 1). In fact, were it not for the very slightly off center angle of the camera, it would be impossible to tell which half of the image was the real woman in the real room and which was the reflected copy. The text of the ad, framed symmetrically between the authentic and the copied legs of the woman, reads, "I love the way it looks on me," and a smaller block of text below continues, "and so does he." The act of self-reflection, both in the text and in the presence of the mirror, is triangulated through an unseen man who looks upon her, implicitly from our point of view, approving the slim, doubled body.

In a different print ad, this one for Coppertone in 1988 (figure 2), two women in swimsuits stand side by side on an ocean deck. One faces the camera, the other looks out to the

water behind them, the words “Summertime’s Back” printed across their bodies. The women have similar skin tones and physical builds, identical white swimsuits, and white towels draped around their heads (out of which peaks wisps of brown hair). Because one of the women’s faces is not visible, it’s not clear if the two are meant to be the same woman, or merely two nearly-identical women. The text across their bodies seems to gesture to the first of these possibilities; the ad carries a sly pun, suggesting that the woman facing us is “summertime,” and that the second figure is that same woman turned around, revealing “summertime’s back” (literally, the back of summertime’s body).

(Fig. 1: Stouffer’s Lean Cuisine advertisement, left. Fig. 2: Coppertone advertisement, right.)

Martha Nussbaum and others point to interchangeability (or fungibility) as one of the means by which a human being can be objectified (257). Indeed, anyone who has ever seen a James Bond film is familiar with the posters of multiple beautiful, but undifferentiated, women draped provocatively around Bond’s body (or, conversely, relegated to background decoration

while his body remains unaffected in the foreground). This anonymity renders the female bodies interchangeable, like identical dollars that can be traded or collected in order to confer sexual and social capital onto the male figure. The print ads above take interchangeability a step further, showing us images of women that are so identical that they resemble, and at times are, the exact same person – a person whose body is available for evaluation, in part, by virtue of its identicality with other bodies. The incorporation of these bodies into architectural space (as *part* of the mirrored room) or season in which the ad is set (as the *embodiment* of summertime) deemphasize their individuality in favor of their instrumental[17] role in building the ads' setting.

Contemporaneous with the ads above, the themes of copying and their implications for women's bodies and selves received considerable attention by poststructuralist feminist theorists. In *The Newly Born Woman*, Cixous performs her own complicated copying when she offers a quotation from Nietzsche's *Gay Science* as a counterpoint to women's experience. Unlike Nietzsche, who can hang a proclamation over his door that "The house I live in is my own / I never copied anyone," woman "has not been able to live in her 'own' house, her very body" (1986 68). Through this quote and her commentary, Cixous suggests a division between men, who are securely situated in the site of their house/body, and women, who are, in a single move, expelled from originality and body. The fact that Cixous makes this point through a quotation from another source points to this divergence: Nietzsche "never copied anyone," but Cixous must copy Nietzsche.

When presented with copies of women's bodies in late twentieth century popular culture, what models of embodiment present themselves as appropriate means to understand those

[17] Nussbaum identifies instrumentality as yet another facet of objectification (257).

bodies? With *In Praise of Copying*, Marcus Boon offers a suggestion about the origin of the taboo around copying that is instructive here:

> Arguably, the first 'copies' that human beings encountered in the current pejorative sense of the word were the dead bodies of members of their community. These dead bodies were 'undifferentiated,' in the sense that Girard uses the word—emptied of the life and agency that gave them a particular form, returning back to nature and formlessness. Dead bodies already have some of the qualities attributed to copies, in the sense that they are viewed as degraded versions of originals; and the taboo-like atmosphere that surrounds copying and copies may come from a feeling of discomfort, even horror, with dead bodies, in which being no longer manifests itself in outward appearance. Reduced to skeletons, most human beings look the same; reduced to matter, the human body is absorbed back into the earth. (99)

The body's "reduc[tion] to matter" after death renders it interchangeable with other corpses, all of which create uncomfortable (even degraded) echoes of the human lives they once contained.[18] The copy is, in this way, an extreme iteration of the dualist separation of mind and body, suggesting that the copy is merely a hollow body that has not been given meaning by an inhabiting mind—that without the rational mind we are relegated to what Cool and Frost describe as "the passivity of matter" (8). Because these binary divisions are so often mapped onto masculine and feminine social roles, as well as literal male and female bodies, women who are presented as copies are subject to exaggerations of the assumed emptiness, inhabitability, and fungibility with which female bodies in general are already described.

In Cixous's own writing there is an implied (though never expressly elaborated) link between women's reliance upon (or consignment to) copying and women's bodies as inhabitable sites.[19] When she mourns the fact that she, as a reader, is implicated in the reproduction of a

[18] This figuration of dead bodies, and of copies, as empty containers obviously repeats a central theme of embodiment as it was presented (and refigured) in Chapter One.
[19] In discussions of the feminine, this site is metaphorical, but frequent references to the penetrability of woman's body blur the line between gender and sex.

literary history which has no room for her, Cixous expresses her unwillingness to identify with the tragic heroines of Greek myth as a refusal to be confined in a body that is not her own: "I cannot inhabit a victim, no matter how noble. I resist: detest a certain passivity, it promises death for me. So, who shall I be? I have gone back and forth in vain through the ages and through the stories within my reach, yet find no woman into whom I can slip" (1986 77). In this quote, a decision about whether to reproduce (i.e. copy) a textual trend is imagined through the character as an inhabitable "space." Further, her refusal to be resigned to passivity, in light of the Boon passage quoted above, points to the way in which gender roles, copying, and inhabitability are all intertwined, and that the promise of death to which she refers comes, in part, from the dualist pressure to position women as more bodily, and, through that embodiment, closer to supposedly dead material that lacks an animating (and, implicitly, masculine) spark.

Just two years before this assertion by Cixous, this pairing of copying and emptiness appears in an early scene from William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984), the first novel of the cyberpunk genre. Case, the protagonist, is paired with Molly to covertly enter an orbiting station to steal a computer construct. In order to assist her with the code-breaking necessary for this theft, Case (from a remote location) is hooked up to a "simstim" through which he receives a virtual feed of all of Molly's sensory experiences. He is, quite literally, "jacked into" her body; he is her "rider." Once all the players are in position for this heist, Case's experience "inside"[20] Molly is one that emphasizes her body as simultaneously copied and inhabitable:

> The scrambler blurred the visual input slightly. She stood before a wall of gold-flecked mirror in the building's vast white lobby, chewing gum, apparently fascinated by her own reflection. Aside from the huge pair of sunglasses concealing her mirrored insets,

[20] There is, of course, an argument to be made that she is the one "inside" him in this moment, because his bodily experiences are informed by hers. However, the repeated use of metaphors of entrance (including "jacked in" and "rider") motivate my choice, from here forward, to read this as a metaphor of Case being "inside" Molly's body. I will note any departures from this metaphor where appropriate.

> she managed to look remarkably like she belonged there, another tourist girl hoping for a glimpse of Tally Isham. She wore a pink plastic raincoat, a white mesh top, loose white pants cut in a style that had been fashionable in Tokyo the previous year. She grinned vacantly and popped her gum. (60-61)

Immediately after he starts to "ride" Molly, Case experiences blurred vision—the scrambler[21] impedes his use of Molly's eyes, subtly reminding him (and us) that he is distinct from the body whose sensorium he experiences in this moment. The scrambler itself is a means of letting Case, via Molly, enter this building without detection. This further compounds the representation of Molly's body as an inhabitable site; her body is rendered analogous to this architectural space by virtue of Case's alien occupation of both. Once Case, and, with him, the reader, do manage to look out through Molly's eyes, the first thing we see is Molly's body reflected back at us in the mirror: through her inhabited body, we confront her copied body. That mirror is itself linked to the lobby that houses them (reminding us again of the body as a quasi-architectural site), a lobby she has entered by dressing like one of the interchangeable tourist girls (girls who are mere copies of one another). References to inhabitation and duplication are interwoven here, each seeming to extend into the other. Though they don't, in this moment, announce the same threat to animation and agency that Cixous's text warns of, other presentations of this pairing in Gibson's novel bring with them similar threats against the bodily autonomy of his female characters.

In this chapter, I examine copied and inhabitable bodies in two interconnected novels by William Gibson and Kathy Acker. In Gibson's *Neuromancer*, I argue that the copied and inhabitable female body becomes a component in the architecture of the protagonist's interior moments of self-relation, doing so in a way that plays out the concerns of contemporaneous examinations of embodiment. Further, the particular economies of embodiment and self-relation

[21] The scrambler is a device that disguises Case's presence as Molly's rider and prevents the station's security team from realizing that Case is able to remotely monitor them.

that Gibson employs reflects a wider cultural anxiety about the complicity of everyday subjects in the perpetuation of sexual violence. From there, I turn to Acker's text, which features an oft-examined reproduction of key scenes and specific language from Gibon's novel. I first establish the theoretical connections between her plagiarism practice and her interest in Hèléne Cixous—identifying a direct plagiarism of Cixous herself in Acker's novel that critics have not discussed, and which complicates the context in which Acker's plagiarisms are most often read. I then argue that Acker uses her textual copies of Gibson to function as penetrable *textual bodies* (using inhabitable language the way Gibson used inhabitable women), ultimately employing Gibson's own models for inhabitation as the devices structuring her use of his text.

Twin Mirrors: Women, Dualism, and the Inhabitable Copies of *Neuromancer*

Neuromancer is set in a dystopian near-future in which professional hackers, or "console cowboys," roam the virtual realm of cyberspace,[22] using their professional skills to "punch down" walls of code and manipulate information. The central character, Case, was one such cowboy, until he stole from an employer who, in retribution, permanently damaged his nervous system to prevent him from ever "jacking in" again. Doomed to live only in the "meat" world of his body, having "[fallen] into the prison of his own flesh" (6), Case moves to Japan and becomes a drug dealer (and addict). He takes increasingly reckless professional risks in the barely concealed hope that the mean streets of Chiba will catch up with him—become partners, as it were, in a drawn-out assisted suicide. It is in this state that Case meets Armitage, a powerful and mysterious ex-military figure who will reverse Case's neurological damage if Case will use his newly regained professional skill for Armitage's benefit. Case is ushered through a series of

[22] Gibson is, in fact, the author who first coined the word "cyberspace."

dangers and thefts by Molly, a deadly fighter whose many biomechanical upgrades include retractable blades under her fingernails and—importantly for my analysis—a pair of mirrored insets that cover her eyes, enhancing her vision and feeding her a stream of information. As Case and Molly work for, and eventually plot against, Armitage, they interact with a storyworld (both physical and virtual) populated by clones, constructs, and holographs.

The novel both reflects Cartesian dualism and tests its limits, examining an exaggerated and exploitable divide between the body and the mind. In particular, *Neuromancer* demonstrates the operation of the body as the container for a psychological interior, one that, in the world of this novel, can be literally deposited and removed from that container at will. Case's movement between the meat world and cyberspace highlights the extent to which the body functions as a site of occupation for the subject.[23] The body is something to be filled, altered, and traversed, both virtually and physically (a slippery distinction, in this novel). An equal amount of attention is paid to the trope of "copies" and copying. Characters are reproduced in both the meat and cyber worlds—as powerful families of clones, as holographic projections, or as virtual personality constructs—and there is a running trope of mirrors and mirroring (including, but not limited to, the mirrored insets on Molly's own face). Similar to the passages of Cixous quoted above or the print ads with which this chapter began, *Neuromancer* presents copied bodies and inhabitable bodies with such frequency, and with such increasingly complicated intermingling, that the body's inhabitability eventually appears to be a function of its copied status, as if the act of reproduction has left the body hollow, vulnerable to invasion.

[23] Case admits, grudgingly, that he maintains some connection with his physical body in cyberspace (enough to manipulate his console), but even this link is called into question when Case repeatedly flatlines—his physical body is dead for minutes at a time while his consciousness remains in cyberspace.

This hollowness characterizes the presentation of Linda Lee, Case's quasi-girlfriend and perhaps the novel's most proliferate copy. She is more frequently reproduced than any other character,[24] and even when she is not copied via technology, Case frequently sees faces of women who remind him of Linda. She is introduced to the reader through a description of their first meeting in an arcade, in which her function as a mirror for surrounding games and lights takes over her body and eclipses any direct access to her as a character:

> Under bright ghosts burning through a blue haze of cigarette smoke, holograms of Wizard's Castle, Tank War Europa, the New York skyline. . . . And now he remembered her that way, her face bathed in restless laser light, features reduced to code: her cheekbones flaring scarlet as Wizard's Castle burned, forehead drenched with azure when Munich fell to the Tank War, mouth touched with hot gold as a gliding cursor struck sparks from the wall of a skyscraper canyon. He was riding high that night, with a brick of Wage's ketamine on its way to Yokohama and the money already in his pocket. He'd come in out of the warm rain that sizzled across the Ninsei pavement and somehow she'd been singled out for him, one face out of the dozens who stood at the consoles, lost in the game she played. The expression on her face, then, had been the one he'd seen, hours later, on her sleeping face in a portside coffin, her upper lip like the line children draw to represent a bird in flight. (8)

On the night they met, Linda's face reflected the lights from the arcade games, and in his memory she is "reduced to code" (somewhat reminiscent of a reduction to mere matter), to her face as a mirror surface of the lights around her. She visually reproduces the games around her, and via her function in copying them comes the implication that she, like the games, might be playable—available for avatar-like inhabitation. Despite being "singled out for him," the reader has no concrete information about her face itself. He sees, but we don't, the "expression on her

[24] Though Dixie Flatline, a masculine construct (a reproduction of Case's dead colleague), appears in more scenes than Linda, he is present only in cyberspace, whereas Linda's copies appears in more of the novel's "locations": in person, as a construct, in an altered simstim feed, and in an off-the-grid virtual realm (separate from regular cyberspace) where Case meets the novel's title character.

face." Even her face's most concrete physical detail, her upper lip, is obscured from the reader by the children's drawing to which it is compared (a drawing which, itself, is a representation of something else). Her face is constructed by the copies it makes of other things.

This reduction to the copying function stops all narrative access to Linda beyond the surface of her body. That body, however, is both omnipresent and, in multiple ways, inhabitable. When Linda herself enters the story (shortly after Case finishes thinking through the memory quoted above) the description of her body resembles, in idiosyncratic detail, the Jarre de Thé teahouse where she and Case meet, thus visually presenting her body as an analogue for inhabitable space. The "black ring of grounds in his empty coffee cup" (9) stand in for her frightened, vacant eyes, "ringed" (9) with "black paintstick" (8). The tabletop whose laminate is "dull with a patina of tiny scratches," causing Case to reflect upon "the countless random impacts required to create a surface like that," recall the "lines of pain [that] were starting to etch themselves permanently at the corners of her mouth" (9). Her face is "filmed with sweat" (10), repeating the word used to describe the "film" over the mirrored surfaces of the Jarre, "leaving each surface fogged with something that could never be wiped away" (9). The episode in the Jarre de Thé constitutes, at the level of discourse, an entrance into the space of Linda's body—her body is positioned at the outer posts of the episode itself, so that we enter her to gain access to it. Within that site, we have access to a story in which Case remembers her, then speaks to her, but never really connects to her. The final image of the scene both brings together the copying and housing functions of her body and traps her within those paired functions: as the "door swung shut behind him, [Case] saw her eyes reflected in a cage of red neon."

Nearly all of the *Neuromancer* characters who are cloned or holographically copied are women. Even the copied men,[25] like the construct of pimp Lonny Zone, suggest that Linda—by virtue of her female body—is one among an interchangeable multitude: "'I know your Linda, man. I know all the Lindas. Lindas are a generic product in my line of work'" (144). Zone's invocation of the copy as a way to discuss his prostitution ring is apt: the assumed identicality of women is part of the sexist and capitalist structure that allows him to view the female body as a commodity; their status as objects depends, in part, upon their status as identical copies.[26] The female characters in this novel are also positioned as the producers of copies; Linda reflects the holographs, Molly's eyes mirror everything she looks at.

Thomas Foster suggests that the dualist presentation of masculinity as cerebral and femininity as bodily—an assumption that undergirds, I argue, the presentation of female bodily inhabitability—is particularly widespread in cyberpunk as a genre, which he describes via examples from *Neuromancer*: "This dichotomy between overembodiment and (a desire for) disembodiment, celebrated as freedom, is often taken as evidence that cyberpunk fiction is both unable to think its way out of Cartesian mind/body dualisms and also invests in a reinscription of gender and racial norms" (50). This binary heavily informs the construction of the relationship between Case and Molly: his profession uses his mind, whereas her multiple professions are based in the body. Ann Cahill further posits the exploitive nature of this binary: "Women were bodies so that men could be minds—so that men could be human" (2001 53). Cixous, invoking the image of the "phantom doll" (itself already lifeless, replicable, and devoid of the animation

[25] Tyler Stevens, though primarily concerned with the constructs of men, argues that gender is a determinate factor in the self-identification of constructs: "This novel intimates that the AI who attempts to communicate with or control a human finds stability of identity not in the particular bodies it inhabits but in the gender of those bodies" (418).

[26] For more on the depiction of sex work, see my analysis of Molly's "meat doll" backstory later in the chapter.

reserved for masculinity)[27] describes female embodiment as that which provides more than simply the structural foundation for men's status as cerebral, but that this embodiment is intertwined with the very machinery of masculine self-relation:

> Is that me, a phantom doll, the cause of sufferings and wars, the pretext, 'because of her beautiful eyes,' for what men do, says Freud, for their divine illusions, their conquests, their havoc? Not for the sake of 'me,' of course. But for my 'eyes' so that I will look at you, so that he will be looked at, so that he will see himself seen as he wants to be. (69)

The woman's own agency and identity are removed, and her function is simply to reflect back to her suitor the image of himself that he wants to see. Her body, like the mirror, is both materially necessary for this reflection to take place, yet invisible to the man who sees himself through her.[28]

Indeed, in many of the scenes in which female bodies are presented as copied or inhabitable, their narrative presence facilitates a moment of mental self-reflection for Case, emphasizing the function of this construction of the female body as a structuring component within his intra-subjective self-relation.[29] For example, when Case encounters a copy of Linda in cyberspace, he experiences internal fragmentation, followed by self-address:

> 'It's good to see you, man.' She squeezed his hand.
>
> He smiled.
>
> Something cracked.
>
> Something shifted at the core of things. The arcade froze, vibrated—
>
> She was gone. The weight of memory came down, an entire body of knowledge driven into his head like a Microsoft into a socket. Gone. He smelled burning meat. The sailor in the white t-

[27] In *Neuromancer*, the figure of the doll is used in precisely this way, in a scene I discuss later in this chapter.
[28] This also bears comparison to the discussion of the female body as medium in Chapter One.
[29] For example, though it is not dealt with very directly in the text: when Case has sex with Molly, the mirrored insets over her eyes mean that he is confronted with reflections of himself through his penetration of her body.

> shirt was gone. The arcade was empty, silent. Case turned slowly, his shoulders hunched, teeth bared, his hands bunched into involuntary fists. Empty. A crumpled yellow candy wrapper, balanced on the edge of a console, dropped to the floor and lay amid flattened butts and styrofoam cups.
>
> 'I had a cigarette,' Case said, looking down at his white-knuckled fist. 'I had a cigarette and a girl and a place to sleep. Do you hear me you son of a bitch? Do you hear me?' (117-118)

Stemming from this one moment of contact with the copied Linda, the cyber world itself (the world Case's mind is inside of) begins to come apart. The "space" of his mind is equally disturbed, by the "weight" of memory that is "driven" into him—he, too, cracks and divides, after a fashion. This makes a new self-consciousness available to him in this moment, and he looks at his own hand and reflects upon the situation in which he now finds himself. The copied Linda is a catalyst for, but not a participant in, an internal division that allows him to see himself and his situation differently. Even though he does not literally occupy her body as he did Molly's, her status as copied and empty creates a narrative structure that houses his divided interior, performing a complicated mirroring within the space of his own mind.

In her writings on space and the body, Elizabeth Grosz offers this interpretation of Irigaray:

> In a rigid containment or mortification of women's explorations of their own notions of spatiality (and temporality), men place women in the position of being 'guardians' of their bodies and their spaces, the condition of being both bodies and space without body or space of their own: they become the living representatives of corporeality, of domesticity, of the natural order that men have had to expel from their own self-representations in order to construct themselves as above-the-mundane, beyond the merely material. (1995 122)

Within *Neuromancer*, Molly is quite literally a "guardian" of Case's body; it is through her protection of his physical form that he is able to let go of the meat world and safely do his work

in cyberspace. Grosz is explicit that women's role, however, is not simply to occupy the position diametrically opposed to men's: "This containment within the (negative) mirror of men's self-reflections strips women of an existence either autonomous from or symmetrical with men's: it relegates women to the position of support or precondition of the masculine." As in the scene with Linda above, women function as part of the architecture of men's selfhood, and Grosz makes clear that the expulsion of women to "mere" materiality is part of what *produces* women as "support or precondition," facilitating masculine self-reflection and thereby masculine subjectivity itself. Grosz suggests, through Irigaray, that women are cast in this role because, in order to get sufficient control and perspective to access the self, men have to get clear of the body. As we saw in Cixous's writing, the reduction of women to their corporeal dimension and the wresting from women of any control they might have over their own bodies—the body that is at once their only marker and not within their control—occurs alongside is the use of women as components in the architecture of male "self-reflections." These two work in tandem, because the idea of the autonomous, discrete subject requires a denial of the self-reflection required to make that subject, creating the necessary reduction of women to the mere material, easily overlooked: "To sustain this fantasy of auto-production and pure self-determination in a systematic way, men have had to use women as the delegates of men's materiality" (1995 122). *Neuromancer* presents a phallocentric economy of self-consciousness, one whose effect on women also echoes Cixous's comments on gender/sexual politics. Noting the disappearance of women into this economy, as described by Grosz above, Cixous asks: "Where is she, where is woman in all the spaces he surveys, in all the scenes he stages within the literary enclosure?" She answers that women are in the shadow, "Shut out of his system's space, she is the repressed that ensures the system's functioning" (1986 68).

Meat Puppets: Rape, Embodiment, and Interiority

The presentation of the copied female body in *Neuromancer* highlights the aspects of embodiment to which women are already framed as culturally vulnerable: hollowness, fungibility, inhabitability. While these figurations seem initially abstract (though the genre of Gibson's novel affords the narrative the ability to explore them more concretely), they are also intimately tied in with received understanding of female anatomy, with the cultural pressure put on the vagina as a literal site of bodily entrance. In ""Foucault, Rape, and the Construction of the Feminine Body," Cahill argues that, regardless of the gender identity of either the perpetrator or the victim, rape (and, more specifically, the threat of rape) forms an integral part of how female embodiment is culturally experienced and understood. Despite the fact that male bodies are equally available for penetration, the female body's emplacement in the wider cultural landscape produces that body as one of a would-be victim, such that even assaults against male bodies are understood through the rhetoric of feminization. The physical sites of the body, any body, that are vulnerable to sexual assault are culturally coded as feminine, and women themselves "will be likely to experience a rape in some important sense as a threat fulfilled" (2000 60). This section explores the role of figurative and literal sexual violence in the production of the copied and inhabitable female bodies of *Neuromancer*, as well as that violence's relationship to the moments of masculine self-relation those bodies structure.

The first time Case "rides" Molly's through simstim, his relationship with her body is described in a way that evokes rape:

> Cyberspace slid into existence from the cardinal points. Smooth,
> he thought, but not smooth enough. Have to work on it...
> Then he keyed the new switch.

> The abrupt jolt into other flesh. Matrix gone, a wave of sound and color... She was moving through a crowded street, past stalls vending discount software, prices feltpenned on sheets of plastic, fragments of music from countless speakers. Smells of urine, free monomers, perfume, patties of frying krill. For a few frightened seconds he fought helplessly to control her body. Then he willed himself into passivity, became the passenger behind her eyes. (55)

Not only do the combination of physical helplessness and frightened struggle in his first moments of simstim call sexual violence to mind, but the particulars of this description blurs the line between attacker and victim. Case is, in a sense, inside of Molly as he struggles to "control" her body, as if he is metaphorically attacking her, but at the same time he is the one who is described as frightened and helpless. By the final sentence of the paragraph, it is no longer even a struggle between Case and Molly, but between Case and himself, in which he plays the role of both attacker and victim when he "willed himself into passivity." This moment is as provocative as it is slippery. At first Molly appears to be the victim of this metaphorical attack, but is then relegated further, becoming simply the site wherein Case subdues himself. As this metaphoric rape shifts, sentence by sentence, from a treatment of Case and Molly to a treatment of Case's self-relation, it gestures to the implicit violence in any use of the simstim.[30] To "ride" Molly's body already lends itself to the metaphor of sexual entrance. In this scene that entrance is described violently, and Case not only occupies Molly's body, he is *inserted into all positions within the metaphor of that occupation*, as both attacker and victim. His self-relation, in this scene, depends upon these simultaneous physical and narrative penetrations.

[30] There are notable parallel shifts in the description of Molly's body throughout this and other simstim episodes: nearly all of the bodily possessive pronouns are removed, so that "her hand" becomes "a hand" as Case's narrative presence takes over her body.

This troubling mechanics of metaphorical rape[31] as a structural component of masculine self-consciousness also appears in a series of interconnected scenes, each of which hinges upon the sexual assault of a copied or technologically-inhabited woman. The first of these takes place in a resort where Case, Molly, Armitage, and a large dinner audience witness "fucking psychopath"[32] Peter Riviera's performance piece, "The Doll."[33] During the performance, Riviera interacts with an unnamed holographic woman who appears on stage piece by piece, her disembodied body parts float freely in the darkness, slowly expanding and joining until they form a full (copy of a) woman that Riviera "seduces." That woman, Case realizes just before the head is appears, is Molly (or, at least, Molly's naked body as Riviera imagines it).[34] As Molly watches "Her face was blank; the colors of Riviera's projection heaved and turned in her mirrors" (140). In addition to the holographic copy itself, Molly's body in the audience produces copies of the sexual play in which a holographic copy of her body participates: her copied body is forced[35] into acts to which Molly does not consent and the social restrictions of her position in the audience force her to reflect them with the mirrored insets on her eyes. By virtue of two acts of copying, Molly is sexually assaulted. In fact, it is through this violence that her copied and copying bodies are produced in this moment, rendering in frighteningly literal terms the cultural production of the body to which Cahill refers. The holographic copy's limbs emerge *only as*

[31] Even though Case is not performing physical violence on Molly's body, the text very clearly uses the language of violence as a way of explaining their bodily and metaphysical mechanics in relation to one another (and, especially, Case's relationship to himself).
[32] Molly's words.
[33] See my earlier discussion of the doll metaphor in Cixous's writing.
[34] Mark Bould points to the fact of this inexact copy as a means by which Gibson both demonstrates awareness of the exploitive characterization of Molly and attempts to distance his narrative from that exploitation: "Gibson's gesture of displacement -- the sleazy, treacherous junkie Riviera, not Gibson, perceives Molly like this -- demonstrates an awareness that his reworking of hard-boiled conventions constructs Molly as a typical pulp object of male fantasy and obsession, and perhaps even acknowledges culpability in perpetuating such representations. This posture of knowing acquiescence in the seeming autonomy of connotation (and, consequently, in the reader's idiosyncratic reconstruction of the text) can be seen as the ironic playfulness of a post-modernist par excellence, yet it also functions as a denial of responsibility" (21)
[35] Within Riviera's narrative, the sex is consensual; within Gibson's narrative, without Molly's permission, it is not.

Riviera has sex with them, so that Molly's copied body is produced through this violation, and the reflections on her lenses are the only attribute of her otherwise "blank" face to which we have any narrative access, so that her copying body is produced for us through the scene her mirrored insets reflect.

Later in the novel, Molly interrogates, and eventually assassinates, the progenitor of the powerful Tessier-Ashpool family, a family that has survived by making multiple clones of themselves, as well as freezing and thawing various family members to pause and elongate their lives. During that scene, Ashpool informs Molly that every time his slumbering body is thawed, he orders up one of the clones of his daughter in order to rape her. Another of that daughter's clones, Lady 3Jane,[36] received Riviera's dedication at his performance of "The Doll," making this the second scene of assault with a connection to this character. At the end of the assassination scene, Molly finds the corpse of the Jane clone, and Case, who is watching this episode through Molly's eyes via simstim, finds something else:

> There was a click, deep at the very center of things, and the world was frozen.[37] Molly's simstim broadcast had become a still frame, her fingers on the girl's cheek. The freeze held for three seconds, and then the dead face was altered, became the face of Linda Lee.
>
> Another click, and the room blurred. Molly was standing, looking down at a golden laser disk beside a small console on the marble top of a bedside table. A length of fiberoptic ribbon ran like a leash from the console to a socket at the base of the slender neck.
>
> `I got your number, fucker,' Case said, feeling his own lips moving, somewhere, far away. He knew that Wintermute had altered the broadcast. Molly hadn't seen the dead girl's face swirl like smoke, to take on the outline of Linda's deathmask. (185-186)

[36] The number in front of her name indicates her order among the Jane clones.

[37] Note the similarity of this language to Case's earlier confrontation with the virtual Linda: "Something cracked. / Something shifted at the core of things. The arcade froze, vibrated—" (117).

Having accessed this moment through an occupation of Molly's technologically inhabitable body, Case is confronted with not one but two copied women: the first who has been raped and murdered by her father, the second a murdered face of Linda Lee whose virtual substitution for Jane's is its own kind of violence.

The tie between the copied body, the inhabitable body, and sexual violence is even made more explicit as Case confronts Molly the night after Riviera's performance, when Molly describes the traumatic memory "The Doll" triggered for her. She tells him how she saved up the money for her biomechanical upgrades, several years before, by working as a "meat puppet": a biomechanical prostitute whose brain is fitted with a "cut-out chip," which can upload programming tailored to the client's sexual proclivities. Already, the term for this chip suggests that Molly's interiority has been "cut out," leaving her body as a site for insertable stories: narrative rapes. Molly's mind is "absent" from her body during these episodes, which she has only consented to in the abstract.[38] As she pays for her upgrades, her new biomechanical circuitry is incompatible with the cut-out chip, and she begins to remember sexual experiences with the clients. The description of this burgeoning awareness reads like a description of a post-traumatic dissociative flashback, complete with feelings of numbness and dislocation from her literal body: "'I wasn't conscious. It's like cyberspace, but blank. Silver. It smells like rain. . . . You can see yourself orgasm, it's like a little nova right out on the rim of space. But I was starting to remember" (148). Her employers begin renting her out to "specialty markets" without her knowledge, where her flashbacks become worse, until one day she comes to in the middle of a session:

[38] She has agreed to this programming and understands that she will be having sex with the clients, but she is denied the opportunity to give knowing consent for individual activities with clients, a fact that is exploited by her employers when they change her programming without her knowledge.

> ‘I came up. I was into this routine with a customer. . . .’ She dug her fingers deep in the foam. ‘Senator, he was. Knew his fat face right away. We were both covered with blood. We weren’t alone. She was all. . .’ She tugged at the temperfoam. ‘Dead. And that fat prick, he was saying, ‘What’s wrong. What’s wrong?’ ’Cause we weren’t *finished* yet. . . .’ (148 emphasis in original)

Molly’s sexual trauma as a meat puppet emphasizes the dangers in imagining women’s bodies as inhabitable—a set of dangers Gibson cautions against (when expressed through technological manipulation) even while troublingly repurposing (within the text’s treatment of embodiment and subjectivity). And though this specific episode is not about copying, it is intimately linked with Riviera’s holographic performance, as well as the rape and murder of the Jane clone (the murdered woman’s body on the floor in this last puppet experience is a remarkable precursor to Molly’s discovery of Jane’s body). It is not simply that the women of this novel are repeatedly made victims of sexual violence; it is that their bodies’ function as copied, copying, or inhabitable sites troublingly produces and is produced by this trauma.

The presentation of female bodies that are copied, copying, and inhabitable—and the extension of each of these tropes into metaphorical and literal manifestations of sexual violence—is interwoven with the structure of Case’s interior psychological experience. When Molly’s body is holographically copied and assaulted by Riviera, the reader follows Case as he runs out of the restaurant and vomits. The novel foregoes any discussion of Molly’s experience in the immediate moment in exchange for a meditation on Case’s psychological state, as if he himself were the performance’s sole victim. When Case rides Molly via simstim and sees the face of Linda Lee superimposed over the body of a raped Jane clone, the scene becomes about the AI who has hacked the simstim feed as an attempt to send Case a message. Molly’s inhabitable body, the raped Jane corpse, and the virtual copy of Linda’s face are all made into vessels for delivering a message for whom Case is the sole audience. Even when Molly

describes, in detail, her sexual trauma as a meat puppet, the scene is ultimately reoriented back to Case:

> 'I had a visit too, he said, and told her about the window, stumbling over what the Zone-figure had said about Linda. She nodded.
> 'Maybe it wants you to hate something too.'
> 'Maybe I hate it.'
> 'Maybe you hate yourself, Case.' (149)

Case compares Molly's flashback at the Riviera performance with his "visit" from a virtual copy of Lonny Zone.[39] He and Molly don't have any substantive discussion of her emotional response[40] to these memories or to Riviera, but instead their conversation—and the chapter—ends with a turn back to Case's relationship with himself.

The fact that these scenes of rape and trauma really revolve around Case's understanding of himself is not, in and of itself, surprising. There is a long-standing narrative tradition of using violence against women in service of stories that ultimately deal with a crisis of masculinity on the part of the rape victim's male companions.[41] But it isn't simply that the story of these rapes work only in service of his larger story arc; it's that this violence intervenes within his psychological interiority, whether as a medium for messages to Case or as an occasion to pause and address himself. In this way, this violence is written into the interior divide that allows him to address himself; it is a structuring component of his subjectivity. His interiority as a character is structurally dependent upon rape.

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[39] The central topic of this visit with Zone is also about Case's relationship with himself and the effect of copies of Linda on his psyche.

[40] If the text offers any critique of Case's insensitivity toward Molly's trauma, or of his wildly inappropriate comparison of that trauma to his conversation with Lonny Zone, it is a critique too subtle for me to register.

[41] This spans storytelling from classical tales of rape and revenge to modern day media. Gail Simone has compiled and extensive, and growing, online archive of the rape, murder, and dismemberment of women to further the story arc of masculine characters in comic books and graphic novels. She refers to this phenomenon as "the woman in the refrigerator."

Gibson's text literalizes, and frighteningly so, metaphors that are used to discuss sexual violence in the world. In her discussion of the bodies of rape victims,[42] Ann Cahill proposes the term "derivatization" as more appropriate for feminist theory than the conventional "objectification," and she does so using language that positions the victim as a violently co-opted component of the assailant's relationship with himself:[43] "In short, I understand derivatization as a violation of a distinctly Irigarayan ethics of (sexual) difference. To derivatize is to portray, render, understand, or approach a subject solely as the reflection, projection, or expression of another subject's being, desire's, fears, etc." (2009 14). Case is, of course, never the performer of the literal violence. Gibson not only makes clear that Case is disturbed by sexual assault, but that Case's discomfort with sex—because of its association with the corporeal world from which he longs to escape—leaves him little agency in the face of those desires he still has, and that the sex he does have in the novel places him in a passive position. Despite this, the narrative nonetheless structures his ability to see himself, at several key moments, around an integrated act or image of rape. He does not perform derivatization, but is consistently positioned as the complicated beneficiary of the reflections it causes.

This novel is contemporaneous, not only with feminist theory that examines the complicated relationship between masculine self-reflection and the function of female embodiment, but with a period of transition in social activism around the topic of real world sexual violence. The 1980s saw important changes in the way that rape was framed in popular discourse, a development which occurred alongside (though, at times, in resistance to) changes in

[42] Though I use the word "victim" here, I generally prefer the more politically empowering term "survivor." Cahill is referring to position of women's bodies during the moment of the attack itself, the moment of victimization, which I see as distinct from the process of recovery after the attack, during which the word "survivor" would be more appropriate.

[43] While she acknowledges the existence of men who are rape survivors, women who are rapists, and transgender persons on both sides of this divide, Cahill purposefully uses the masculine pronoun in her discussion of rapists.

anti-rape activism. In her study *Rape on the Public Agenda: Feminism and the Politics of Sexual Assault,* Maria Bevacqua discusses the shift from the 1970s, in which anti-rape activism began breaking the taboo of discussing sexual violence and helped dramatically raise cultural awareness of rape as a problem, to the 1980s, in which media attention to rape slowed (152), and during which an anti-feminist backlash to this activism began taking shape (181-193). The increased public attention of the 1970s also had the effect of creating a larger body of research on the topic of rape itself, revealing that the vast majority of sexual assaults fell far outside the culturally accepted narrative of the stranger in the alleyway (153-157). Increasing attention to date rape, acquaintance rape, and campus rape had the dual effect of drawing greater awareness to the flaws in conventional rape narratives (work that continues in anti-rape activism today) and contributing to the trivialization of these crimes as less violent, less important, or even the result of victim culpability (fulfilling the sense of inevitability Cahill discusses in her essay on rape as a component of female embodiment). In some ways, *Neuromancer*'s treatment of sexual violence reflects both the increased visibility of that topic in the 1970s and the resignation to its inevitability typical of the 1980s.

This was a time period during which rape was revealed to exist, not in the darkened corners to which our culture could not extend its civilizing influence, but within the relationships that were fully integrated in our daily cultural life. The realization that rapists included seemingly ordinary, socially integrated people was a terrifying one, which had the potential (and still does) to either spearhead a broader examination of the cultural practices and systems that support the perpetration of rape or to trigger a massive disavowal of the existence and legitimacy of the rape narratives that came to the surface during these years. The question of sexual assault as integrated into the very cultural systems by which we understand who we are received

increasing attention during the 1980s and beyond. In *Neuromancer*, the portrayal of a protagonist whose intense moments of self-reflection are structurally dependent on the presentation of rape gestures, if quietly, to that broader cultural anxiety.

Killing the Father: Rape and Literary Influence in Acker

Published four years after *Neuromancer*, Kathy Acker's *Empire of the Senseless* takes a dramatically different approach to the role of the copy in the presentation of rape:

> 'Why don't you do it with mommy, daddy?'
> 'We're too old. We don't do it anymore.' His right hand was rubbing my breast.
> 'I'm going to phone mommy.' Over the phone, I told her that her husband was trying to do something to me. I didn't use the word "fuck."
> She said, 'Let me speak to him.'
> 'Daddy, mommy wants to speak to you.'
> I don't remember if his hand left my nipple. I don't know what they said to each other.
> After he put the phone receiver down on the table, he put his cock up me. There was no more blood than in a period.
> Part of me wanted him and part of me wanted to kill him.
> So I stayed in their apartment and that night I dreamed that the blood lying over the ocean in front of my eyes was light. The light by which I could see. The fishing boats sink or stink. (1988 12)

As in *Neuromancer*, this scene from Acker's novel pairs sexual violence with a moment of self-reflection. However, here the person who experiences internal fragmentation and, eventually, burgeoning self-awareness is the rape victim herself. Immediately after the scene quoted above, the fulfilment of that self-awareness is temporarily delayed by a seemingly random discussion of the artistic merits of German Romanticism. The lengthy paragraph on this artistic movement does not distract from, but rather participates in, a set of textual arguments that extends and complicates this presentation of paternal rape. Rather than the copied body, as in *Neuromancer*,

Acker explores the relationship between rape, embodiment, and subjectivity through a paragraph of a copied text; the treatise on German Romanticism (which I will analyze at greater length momentarily) was not authored by Acker herself, but is a copy of a passage from *Prénoms de Personne* by Hèléne Cixous. To my knowledge, the appearance of this Cixous passage in *Empire of the Senseless* has never before been identified. In fact, in his 2006 study, *The Scholar's Art: Literary Studies in a Managed World*, Jerome McGann offers the scene quoted above, along with the succeeding paragraph on German Romanticism as an example of Acker's typical writing style, one that oscillates between depravity and sophistication, unaware that half of the passage he quotes was authored by Cixous and not Acker (6-7).[44]

That Acker has a penchant for artfully plagiarizing other texts is not a revelation on my part. Indeed, next to her admiration of William S. Burroughs and her fondness for motorcycles and tattoos, it may be one of the qualities for which she is best known. Brian McHale offers a less than generous reading of Acker's co-opted and altered literary fragments, asserting that "Acker's rewrite has no discernible purpose aside from that of producing the 'sampling' effect itself" (234). Whereas, for McHale, Acker falls short of the postmodern writers who use this technique as a form of reflection, diagnosis, and cultural criticism, Richard House offers a more generous reading of Acker's political intentions in reproducing older texts: "her goal is not to perpetuate the past's cultural relics but to attack them: her aim is to interfere with the continuous reproduction of present institutions, not to facilitate it" (453). Victoria de Zwaan similarly finds Acker's literary copies to interact more meaningfully with their source texts, though her description suggests a more ambivalent, possibly even positive, relationship between the copy

[44] I don't intend to single out, much less critique, McGann for this; Maureen F. Curtin makes a similar assumption, describing this passage as one of Acker's "more overtly theoretical moments" (94). These attributions of the copied text to Acker herself are the result of the modality of Acker's own style, rather than any lack on the part of McGann, Curtin, or others.

and the original: "despite the introduction of crude pornographic passages into canonical texts and other literary disruptions, Acker does not do violence or even destroy her source texts: rather, in what turn out to be cogent, creative, and even sensitive readings, she creates a narrative of desublimation for each of the narratives she uses" (261). Acker's short piece "The Meaning of the Eighties" indicates some of this ambivalence. The story takes the form of a series of letters between two foul-mouthed seven year olds who debate, among other things, the literary merits of William Gibson (137-142). Even though their assessments of his writing aren't necessarily Acker's own, the appearance of this story shortly after the publication of her now-infamous plagiarism of *Neuromancer* in *Empire of the Senseless* invites the reader to look for a degree of ambivalence, even self-contradiction, in her treatment of Gibson's text.

Caren Irr outlines a clear relationship between Acker's plagiarism and her sexual politics: "Acker's intense and long-standing concern with female embodiment becomes directly pertinent to her critique of intellectual property" (113). Irr's is a particularly well-constructed analysis among a larger body of criticism[45] that argues Acker is using her repetition-with-a-difference to undermine the structural sexism of her source texts and/or to make a place for herself—as a woman—among a predominantly masculine American avant-garde. Acker's own commentary on her writing generally accommodates such readings: "[As] a rule, I haven't thought, 'I am a woman, a feminist, and I'm going to appropriate a male text.' What happens is that I frame my work way after I write it. […] I realized that *Don Quixote* is very much about trying to find your voice as a woman" (13). However, since Acker's plagiarism in this paternal rape scene is of not only a female writer, but a feminist theorist, the assumption that Acker's aim in plagiarism is to

[45] Including Terry Engebretsen, Svetlana Mintcheva, Sheri Weinstein, Jan Corbett, Jeffrey Ebesen, and others.

turn the tables on masculinist social and literary culture does not accommodate a full reading of the scene.

In *Prénoms de Personne*, her first return to literary criticism after the completion of her doctoral project, Cixous plays close attention to the concerns of writing, narcissism, and the unified subject through her analysis of some of her literary "fathers." This text has received little scholarly attention, though critic and translator Verena Andermatt Conley discusses it briefly in her volume length work on Cixous, focusing especially on the paternal implications of the readings in *Prénoms*:

> To a (metaphoric) death—castration—of the other, Cixous opposes love and affirmation of the other. Desire undoes absolute knowledge, reason, mastery; decapitates (paternal) authority; divides the origin, the 'I,' as a dramatically autonomous machine overtakes authorial control of language. In these early texts it is a question of the limitless, of (impossible) births, of beginnings, of the inscription of a feminine. Yet the writing scene is still in the shadow of the father. (14)

Cixous uses a series of readings of men writers she both admires and challenges to launch a broader critique of the patriarchal inheritance of writing itself. Conley is very explicit about the familial overtones of this relationship: "Most readings in *Prénoms de Personne* approach the question of the limits between self and other, masculine and feminine, from the angle of the daughter, Cixous's own position in her early writings" (20). In short, Cixous is performing, with criticism, exactly what Acker is often said to be doing with fiction. Acker, for her part, amplifies this aspect of Cixous's project, not only by stealing Cixous's words, but by depositing them in the middle of a paternal rape scene. Immediately after violence is visited upon the daughter in Acker's text, the critical "daughter" in Cixous's speaks back.

Cixous and Acker are connected in ways that move beyond this local citation of this particular early Cixous text. Acker's fondness for continental philosophy included a strong

interest in the three major "French Feminist" writers (Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva),[46] and the major traits of Cixous's writings—a playful blend of poetic and critical language, an insistence on the intimate connection between writing and the body, a mission of reorganizing the economies of representation in order to give room to those bodies and experiences that have been written out of history—are staples in Acker's novels.[47] Acker's interviews make the feminist stakes of *Empire of the Senseless* explicit:

> What was involved in the writing itself was a dialectic between trying to get another society and realizing you can't. So in the first part of the book I basically took the world of patriarchy and then killed the father on every level I could imagine. Part of this involved my attempt to find a way to talk about taboo—those basic transgressions patriarchy is responsible for but tries to cover over and deny. […] Finally *Empire* isn't just about getting another society (which is a literal impossibility) but about searching for some kind of myth to replace the phallic myth. (McCaffery 32)

Acker's stated goal, as well as the language she uses to describe it, positions *Empire of the Senseless* perfectly in line with Cixous's demand to dismantle patriarchy through writing: "[T]his is the invention of a new insurgent writing which, when the moment of her liberation has come, will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history" (1976 880). Acker herself argues that the general absence of central narratives in the work of women writers like Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, Djuna Barnes, and others, is move away from

[46] Recounting an evening with Acker, poet Richard Peabody writes: "Once Kathy had a salad and some French bread and wine she transformed back into her sweetheart self again. The change was amazing but way too late for Lucinda and me. We were completely fried and nodding out, trying gamely to follow the loud animated conversation that began with Kathy preaching Helene Cixous and 'the phallogocentric power structures of language,' travelled quickly through Derrida, Foucault, Baudrillard, and Gilles Deleuze, to French feminists Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Bracha L. Ettinger, on to books she'd read, then people she'd slept with, and people everybody thought she'd slept with that she actually hadn't slept with, and then people everybody thought she hadn't slept with that she actually had slept with, on to tales of students, and other gigs, and places she'd been, to how much she hated NYC now and how much happier she was in San Francisco, and finally as the sun was rising, landed on non-allergenic makeup, motorcycles, and fitness. Wish I'd had a tape recorder" (2013).

[47] In *Reading Cultures*, Molly Abel Travis offers one of the few critical discussion of this relationship, though it appears that she is referring to Acker's interest in Cixous's theory, rather than the specific copying of Cixous's text (of which Travis appears to be unaware).

phallogocentrism: "It's an attack on the control system, a refusal to uphold the centralized meaning. Whether or not this was theorized, these women don't want the centralized phallus" (McCaffery 34).

Within *Empire of the Senseless* itself, there is a wealth of idiosyncratic connection between the central character, Abhor, and Cixous—few enough not to warrant any claim that Abhor is meant to be Cixous, but enough to give an attentive reader pause. Abhor's family history, including the "[v]oluntary . . . political exile" of German-Jewish grandparents, reads like a scrambled version of Cixous's own parentage and her family's flight from Nazi persecution, and Cixous's childhood home of Algeria is a constant presence in the novel. Cixous's deeply important relationship with her own father, whose death in Cixous's early childhood is the subject of much of her writing, offers an important counterpoint for Abhor's extended and complicated paternal sexual abuse. In Cixous's semi-autobiographical novel *Inside,* the intensity of this father-daughter bond blurs the boundaries between these two characters, and a series of notably sensual passages offer a surreal (and deeply Freudian) metaphorical extension of familial love into sexual love: a metaphor that is rendered frighteningly literal in Acker's novel. The title *Empire of the Senseless* itself calls to mind Cixous's discussion of the "Empire of the Selfsame" in *The Newly Born Woman*.[48]

How, then, to read Acker's relationship to Cixous within this rape scene? As with her other literary copies, Acker has made a set of informative changes to her source text:[49]

[48] The relationship between Acker and Cixous is not, however, without disagreement or tension. Acker characterizes Cixous's rebuttal of Kristeva as "Cixous saying that our problems all have their source in genital difference—so that the fact that men have cocks is what makes them evil. […] She's a separatist [. . .] I don't have any problem with guys. I just have a lot of problems with society" (McCaffery 35). Whether Cixous's own assertion that feminine writing is within reach of even those with male bodies is enough to exonerate her of this supposed separatism is not a judgment I'm interested in making here.

[49] This begs the obvious question of where Acker encountered this particular text by Cixous, since it is a minor work that has never, to my knowledge, been translated in its entirety. The only extant translation of this passage available at the time of Acker's writing was probably Conley's critical study of Cixous, in which this particular section on

> The German Romantics had to destroy the same bastions as we do. Logocentrism and idealism, theology, all supports of the repressive society. Property's pillars. Reason which always homogenizes and reduces, represses and unifies phenomena or actuality into what can be perceived and so controlled. The subjects, us, are now stable and socializable. Reason is always in the service of the political and economic masters. It is here that literature strikes, at this base, where concepts and actings of order impose themselves. Literature is that which denounces and slashes apart the repressing machine at the level of the signified. Well before Bataille, Kleist, Hoffman etc., made trial of Hegelian idealism, of the clotering (sic) dialectic of recognition, the German Romantics sung brazenly brassily in brass of spending and waste. They cut through conservative narcissism with bloody razor blades. They tore the subject away from her subjugation to her self, the proper; dislocated you the puppet; cut the threads of meaning; spit at all mirrors which control. (1988 12)

Save for a few reorganized and repositioned clauses, the first sentences of the quote are more or less conventionally translated. The first notable change is to the translation of "au Sujet un," the "unified subject": Acker does away with the reference to unity and calls, instead, upon "the subjects, us," suggesting that the people rendered "stable and socializable" by the "repressive machines" may include her own readers. She makes a similar move when the German Romantics "disloquent la marionette," by making it clear that the "puppet" being "dislocated" is "you," though this direct address to the reader is absent in the original. Acker's most dramatic changes appear in the series of attacks by German Romantics against social constraint, wherein she preserves the central action of these clauses, but expands each to make these gestures more violent or their import more consequential: she supplies the "bloody razor blades" and hears the

German Romanticism is supplied as an example of *Prénoms de Personne*. There are, in fact, several notable similarities in Acker's and Conley's "translations" of Cixous, though they don't provide clear proof that Acker read Conley. Indeed, it seems somewhat out of character for Acker to have used a piece of secondary criticism rather than a piece by Cixous herself. While Acker knew at least some French (according to the staff of the Duke University Libraries, where her papers are housed), it isn't clear if she had the fluency necessary to read a piece of theory this dense in its original language. I am grateful to Ann Shafer and Anna Strowe for their guidance with all three versions—Cixous's, Conley's, and Acker's—which has helped me determine which changes are fully Acker's and which are likely results of an intermediary translation.

"brazenly brassily in brass" tones of their song, she insistently supplies the "meaning" in the threads they cut and the "control" imposed by the mirrors—mirrors they merely "trouble" ("troublent") in Cixous's text, but they "spit at" in Acker's.

These changes do not, as they do in some of Acker's other plagiarisms, offer correctives to or theses on the original text. In her expansion of the sections on literature's fight for resistance, for example, Acker does not problematize those actions: she credits them with even more boldness. This expansion of Cixous's claims is even more dramatic in the alterations Acker makes to the presentation of subjectivity. She brings this passage closer to Cixous, after a fashion, by explicitly gendering the "self" from which the subject is dislocated: "tore the subject away from her subjugation to her self." The appearance of this feminine pronoun (versus the neutral pronoun of Cixous's original), gendering the subject at the moment of her simultaneous liberation and displacement, speaks both to Cixous's larger feminist project and to the narrative context in which this entire passage appears. This torn away subject appears just after Abhor has suffered simultaneous physical and subjective tears; her body is torn by the rape ("There was no more blood than in a period") and she herself is torn into separate parts with separate responses to this event ("Part of me wanted him and part of me wanted to kill him"). Acker's translation of Cixous's subject as a woman aligns a torn gendered subjectivity with a torn sexed body. The interruption of this scene by the Cixous passage accompanies a series of other divisions: divisions into the part of Abhor that wants her father and the part of her that wants to kill him, the fleshly divisions that tear her body and make it bleed, the cultural division of the sexes implied by the gendered pronoun in the Cixous paragraph, and more. As such, this textual interruption comes to emphasize and stand for those divisions, creating a link between the physical material of Cixous's words (and the interruption they create on Acker's page), the

physical material of Abhor's body, and the seemingly non-physical space within Abhor's mind, which will, soon after, be compared to literal, physical space.

Immediately following the rape, Abhor has a dream that much more explicitly creates a link between the interior world of Abhor's mind, [50] the physical space she dreams of moving through, and, by extension, the literary space we traverse with her: "Inside my mind I scream aloud; inside my mind, the world, I scream aloud. Somewhere I am a female and I have long hair and that hair is floating over the soil so dry, for centuries, that nothing ever grows in it" (1988 13). Both the paradox of screaming "aloud" within her own mind and the pause, as if to correct, to state "the world" in a discussion of her mind build an analogy between her psychological experience and the spatial features of the external world. Like the other examples in this chapter, here we see a connection between Abhor's specifically female body and a physically inhabitable space, yet this time it is Abhor herself who inhabits this body, mind, and world.

Writers and Riders: Acker enters Gibson's textual body

Though she doesn't refer directly to the threat of rape, Cixous discusses the ways in which "feminine receptivity" can be redeployed, both for the subject and in the text, as a source of power:

> It is true that a certain receptivity is 'feminine.' One can, of course, as History has always done, exploit the feminine reception through alienation. A woman, by opening herself up, is open to being 'possessed,' which is to say, dispossessed of herself […] Writing is working; being worked, questioning (in) the between (letting oneself be questioned) of same and of other without which nothing lives; undoing death's work by willing the togetherness of one-another, infinitely charged with a ceaseless exchange of one with another—not knowing one another and beginning again only from

[50] Though we are lost in Abhor's voice in this particular scene, it's important to remember that this entire memory has been reported to Abhor's counterpart, Thivai, who recites it for the reader.

> what is most distant, from self, from other, from the other within. (1986 86)

Cixous describes, side by side, a receptivity she sees in the feminine, which includes a productive nonclosure that allows openness to be an engine for creation rather than a restrictive hollowing out, and the process of writing, which includes a similar accommodation of ambiguity, a similar resistance to the rigidity of masculine economies of symbolic representation. She suggests that the very vulnerabilities produced by our figurations of women as open and receptive can be starting points for new textual economies. When reading, finally, Acker's plagiarism of *Neuromancer*, I find it useful to remember the similarities of open bodies and open texts both in Acker's own writing and in the feminist antecedent she herself cites via textual copy. The feminism of Acker's project manifests not simply through a revision of gender and sexuality in *Neuromancer*, but through a provocative deployment of the materiality of text itself as a commentary on, and corrective for, the treatment of human bodies in Gibson's novel.

Acker practices a kind of intertextual receptivity by treating the passages of *Neuromancer* as *bodies* that her text can enter. I've reproduced two passages from Gibson's text below, followed by Acker's collaging of these two into a single episode:

> A pulsing red cursor crept through the outline of a doorway. Only millimeters from the green dot that indicated the location of the Dixie Flatline's construct. He wondered what it was doing to her leg, to walk on it that way. With enough endorphin analog, she could walk on a pair of bloody stumps. He tightened the nylon harness that held him in the chair and replaced the trodes.
>
> Routine now: trodes, jack, and flip. (Gibson 65)

> The road in from the airport had been dead straight, like a neat incision, laying the city open. He'd watched the crazy walls of patchwork wooden tenements slide by, condos, arcologies, grim housing projects, more walls of plyboard and corrugated iron. (Gibson 87)

> ‘We have the capacities for understanding and, at the same time, we understand nothing,’ I replied. I understood we had to find some construct.
>
> She told me again. ‘All I know is we’re looking for a certain construct. Somewhere. Nothing else matters.’ A pulsing red then black cursor crept through the outline of a doorway. With enough endorphin analogue, Abhor could walk on a pair of bloody stumps. ‘You don’t matter and reality doesn’t matter.’ The road away from the airport, which became a series of roads, had been dead straight, like neat incisions, into the open body of the city. Poverty was writing in pink. I had watched, here and there, a machine glide by, bound by fog and grey. Later on there were tenements called ‘council housing’, walls of mottled aluminium, prison guards’ cocks sticking in order to piss through unarranged holes in the brick, more plyboard and corrugated iron walls. The lucky poor had playgrounds. I remembered Abhor was a construct. (Acker 1988 34)

As she does at several other points in the novel, Acker has collaged together two moments from Gibson’s text in her creation of her own passage. I am especially interested in how she transitions between these two copied sections of *Neuromancer*. Acker first reproduces a scene in which Case is a “rider” in Molly’s injured body via simstim. Acker does not copy the next moment, when Case “flips” from simstim back to cyberspace. Instead of switching from simstim to cyberspace, Acker switches from one *Neuromancer* passage to another, substituting her textual “flip” for Case’s virtual one. Each passage acts as an analogue for one of the remote spaces (real and virtual) that Case can jack into. At the point of this textual “flip” is a quote, apparently authored by Acker, acting as the hinge between these two copies: “You don’t matter and reality doesn’t matter.” Rather than switch from the physical world to the virtual world, as we do in *Neuromancer*, we pause to think about the reality (or lack thereof) of the textual world itself. Acker’s “flip” from one passage of *Neuromancer* to another, positions Acker’s use of these passages as a combination of Case’s two modes of remote entrance: simstim and hacking.

We, along with Acker, become both cowboys "punching down" Gibson's code and "riders" in the "body" of his novel. I argue that Case's use of both simstim and the cyberspace matrix offer models for the relationship between *Empire of the Senseless* and *Neuromancer*. Further, Acker is able to rescript the problematic presentation *Neuromancer*'s female characters by virtue of her ability to position her text (and her readers along with it) as a "rider" and a "cowboy" simultaneously. As "riders," we enter the bodies of individual Gibson passages and peer out into the larger textual world of which they are part.[51] As "cowboys," we interact with Gibson's words as "code," a pure text of cyberspace that we can manipulate and master in order to get what we came to steal. This is the ultimate expression of the fluid body-text relationship in Acker's novel: the corporeal occupation by the simstim rider and the textual trickery of the console cowboy merge in Acker's and our entrance into Gibson's passages.

The first time Case uses simstim it is to eavesdrop on Molly's meeting with a potential terrorist ally in preparation to steal the construct of Dixie Flatline, and throughout the novel a key virtue of simstim is the riding character's ability to overhear, without detection, the world beyond the body he is occupying. In *Empire of the Senseless*, we similarly "hear" parts of Gibson's novel that are beyond the immediate "body" of the copied passage. In *Neuromancer*, when Molly first meets Case and he mistakes her for his assassin, she chides "'I think you screwed up, Case. I showed up and you just fit me right into your reality picture'" (24). In *Empire of the Senseless*, where this scene is replicated through Abhor and Thivai's first meeting,

[51] In his description of the relationship between these two novels, Michael Hardin writes "Acker begins with *Neuromancer* and inserts her own narratives, creative a text that is quite unlike it in plot and character, and yet highly similar in theme and critique" (6). Though I disagree with the characterization of *Neuromancer* as Acker's starting point, and I think there is a more complicated relationship between the critiques launched by each novel, I do find it interesting that Hardin reaches for the metaphor of insertion to describe what Acker does with Gibson's words once they are placed in her text. Arthur Saltzman takes this metaphor a step further, adding a (very problematic, and I think inaccurately stated) sexual twist: "Plundering the classics is also a way for the female writer to achieve penetration, as her texts crawl on top of his, seducing the books they host via the female-superior position" (111).

this short discussion is absent, and yet Thivai thinks, as if in answer: "If reality isn't my picture of it, I'm lost" (1988 29). Thivai, and the intertextual reader, "overhear" and reply to a part of Case and Molly's conversation that goes beyond the body of the copied section. Like the textual "flip" through "You don't matter and reality doesn't matter," this "riding" of Gibson appears to be marked with continued interest in how the "reality" of textual worlds are constructed. This speaks to Acker's statements on the relationship between literature and representation: "What a writer does, in 19th century terms, is that he takes a certain amount of experience and he 'represents' that material. What I'm doing is simply taking text to be the same as the world, to be equal to non-text, in fact to be more real than non-text, and start *representing text*" (interview with Lotringer, quoted Sorensen 182).

For the "rider" of simstim, the tradeoff for remote access to a body and its surroundings is an enforced passivity. One of the reasons Case prefers hacking, beyond a cowboy's natural disdain for simstim as a "meat toy," is his ability to manipulate his virtual environment, to "punch down walls of code" that separate him from the technology he wants to steal. This is its own form of textual manipulation, one Acker reproduces by "punching down" narrative codes: removing the apparatus of metaphor and other discursive obstacles in order to arrive at a more direct description. For example, in *Neuromancer*, Molly's sexual body is frequently described through metaphors of violence (note the "impaling" metaphor in the quoted text below), and episodes of her bodily injury are in described with fetishistic detail that make them easy metaphors for sex. In *Empire of the Senseless*, Acker stitches together excerpts from Case and Molly's first sex scene with the description of her broken leg after their first heist:

> Where the sky faded from hissing static to the noncolor of the matrix, and he glimpsed the shuriken, his stars. […]
>
> He woke and found her stretched beside him in the dark. […]

> `Case? It's Wednesday, Case.' She moved, rolling over, reaching across him. A breast brushed his upper arm. […]She slid down around him and his back arched convulsively. She rode him that way, impaling herself, slipping down on him again and again, until they both had come, his orgasm flaring blue in a timeless space, a vastness like the matrix, where the faces were shredded and blown away down hurricane corridors, and her inner thighs were strong and wet against his hips. (Gibson 31-32)[52]
>
> A transparent cast ran from her knee to a few millimeters below her crotch, the skin beneath the rigid micropore mottled with bruises, the black shading into ugly yellow. Eight derms, each a different size and color, ran in a neat line down her left wrist. An Akai transdermal unit lay beside her, its fine red leads connected to input trodes under the cast. (Gibson 78)
>
> The sky faded to blood, the colour of blood. After I left the doctor and returned home, what I call home, which was better than I had ever had, Abhor had gotten there before me and was waiting for me, so to speak. Asleep. Naked. I saw her. A transparent cast ran from her knee to a few millemetres below her crotch, the skin mottled by purple and green patches that looked like bruises but weren't. Black spots on the nails, finger and toe, shaded in gold. Eight derms, each a different colour size and form, ran in a neat line down her right wrist and down the vein of the right upper thigh. A transdermal unit, separated from her body, connected to the input trodes under the cast by means of thin red leads. (Acker 1988 33-34)

After Case finishes surgery and is returned home, he wakes and is seduced by Molly. Acker copies the portion of *Neuromancer* that leads into the sex scene, deflating any narrative or sexual tension in this moment with a crude, winking and nodding paraphrase: "waiting for me, so to speak. Asleep. Naked." Acker then copies from a graphic description of Molly's body after her injury, substituting it for what would have been a direct description of their intercourse. This substitution offers the implicit argument that these two scenes are interchangeable, because sex is violence and violence is sex; for example, see the use of "impaling" to describe the sexual penetration of Molly in the first passage above. The combination and conflation of these two

[52] I have removed a large portion of the sex scene here, but I trust my reader gets the gist of it.

passages strips away the metaphoric connection between sex and violence. That metaphor is the code Acker punches down, by simply substituting injury for intercourse she undoes the coyness of their descriptive link and instead puts them into direct equivalence. The importance of this irreverence toward these metaphoric "codes" is suggested further in the *way Empire of the Senseless* transforms Dixie Flatline (a construct who teaches Case to hack) into Acker herself:

> 'All I know is that we have to reach this construct. And her name's Kathy.'
> 'That's a nice name. Who is she?'
> 'It doesn't mean anything.'
> 'If it doesn't mean anything, it's dead. The cunt must be dead.' My puns were dead. (1988 34)

This passage suggests that Acker, as an author function, operates by the kinds of hacking that Dixie Flatline specialized in: a literary hacking that won't even let "puns" survive.

In punching down the code of metaphor, Acker is rescripting the presentation of women's bodies in *Neuromancer*. An even more dramatic example is Acker's treatment of Linda Lee's death scene. In *Neuromancer*, Case is searching out Linda in a busy club where a prizefight is taking place, and the events of her death are depicted metaphorically, through the holographic copies of the fighter that struggles, bleeds, then fades into darkness:

> Blood sprayed from a jugular in a red gout of light. And now the crowd was screaming, rising, screaming -- as one figure crumpled, the hologram fading, flickering...
> Raw edge of vomit in his throat. He closed his eyes, took a deep breath, opened them, and saw Linda Lee step past him, her gray eyes blind with fear. She wore the same French fatigues.
> And gone. Into shadow. (37-38)

Neither Case nor the reader have access to the actual moment of her death, we only infer it through the violence of the holographic fight and her disappearance into shadow, and later confirm it with a viewing of her dead body. Through the textual hacking of *Empire of the*

Senseless, however, we erase the metaphoric connection between the fight and the death of Linda Lee (who, in Acker's text, is known only as "the fuck"):

> The next day, on a street, a garbage dump in front of the river, my former boss himself cut the throat of the fuck who informed on me in front of me. He slaughtered her because it was a practical way of making room for a fresh employee. Capitalism needs new territory or fresh blood.
>
> I saw: blood sprayed from a jugular. (1988 32-33)

Throughout *Neuromancer*, Linda is so completely reduced to her function as a copy/mirror, that her own death is taken away from her body and expressed through holographic copies of other people. Through *Empire of the Senseless*, we enter this episode and punch down the walls of code that separate Linda from her own death. We see the blood spray, not from the fighter's jugular, but from hers.

Reading Character in Acker and Cixous

Acker's treatment of both the bodies in her text and the body of her text puts pressure on the subjectivities of the characters attached to the bodies in question. Alex Woloch describes an ongoing theoretical conflict between referential treatments of character, which describe characters as full human personalities that can be appreciated through proper attention to their psychological interiority, and formalist indebted approaches, which instead emphasize the functional purpose that characters serve in the operations of narrative. Within this conflict, whose two sides he repeatedly states seem, ultimately, to depend on one another, Woloch offers his own intervention. He proposes that a narrative operates as a distributional matrix in which referential characters vie against other characters, and struggle within their own narrative functions, to rise into prominence—as measured by reader/textual attention. He advances a

theory of partial inflection, arguing that there is indeed a referential personality worth considering in each character's case, and that the character's function as a piece of narrative machinery participates in, rather than negates, the extent to which that personality is textually available to the reader. As I discussed in the introduction, Woloch elaborates this theory via examples that use both the body of the described character and the terrain of the novel's discourse as means by which access to the interior life of a character is barred from or granted to the reader, suggesting a strange continuity between body and text as the material by which a character's exterior is built, and within which their private life is housed. In fact, his description of character implies with it a model of embodiment, one in which a hybrid textual-corporeal container holds the animating interior personality that gives life to the character on the page, separating it, not unlike the *cogito* of Descartes, from the mere material that holds it.

The embodiment that emerges only through suggestion in Woloch's description of character comes directly to the fore in Acker's novels. The continuity of body and text that I see quietly tracing its way through Woloch's theory is boldly and provocatively stated in Acker. As Carla Harryman notes, Acker's work is also characterized by a striking juxtaposition of the subjectivity of character and their functions within the narrative, bringing together the very same opposing approaches to character study in which Woloch stages his own intervention. According to Harryman:

> One can think of the emblematic figures in Acker's later fictions as anarchic functions that don't take root as fictional subjects but that instead possess unreliable properties that crowds the space of the novel such that they *don't* come to represent effects of pirated texts or fictional subjectivities. Neither do they exactly *lack* character/subjectivity—rather it seems that they are in an altogether different circumstance: one in which subjectivity, the illusory hallmark of the character, is not a concern. (36)

Harryman describes Acker's work as having room for both function and subjectivity, yet follows Acker in a very different direction from where Woloch stakes his claim. Rather than subjectivities that work to enter the text through and against function, Harryman sees in both subjectivity and function a certain restlessness, indicating Acker's characters work in part by their refusal to sit still for either purpose.

Like the characters Woloch studies, Acker's "crowd" her novels, but this crowding is not identified, as it is in Woloch, as an effect of struggling for reader attention. Instead, the reader plays a very different role in Acker's novels:

> The reader of an Acker work suspends her own interpretive coherence; self-identity in reading multiplies, expands, pixelates, contracts, is undone: the reader becomes to herself a multisensory/sensibility of the text, a further anarchic layer of the text and/or obstruction. Reading further crowds the text. 'I' am interference. (36)

What Harryman suggests, and what Acker's "hacking" and "simstim" textual entrances play out, is a very different role for the reader in what Woloch might call "character-space." Woloch, in part by virtue of the genre and time period of the work he takes into consideration, discusses reader attention with an absence of qualitative language, suggesting a degree of distance between reader and character that fluctuates with the extent of an individual character personality's forever-partial inflection in the surface of the text. What Harryman describes in Acker is a provocative interposition of the reader into the text. I've discussed, throughout this chapter, ways in which the body is produced by both Gibson's and Acker's texts; what Harryman sees here is a reader who is themselves produced by the text. The fragmentation experienced by Case through his interaction with copied and inhabitable female bodies here appears in the reader themselves,

through their occupation of what I argue are Acker's similarly copied and inhabitable textual bodies.

This similarity between female bodies (as sites for men's occupation) and character (as a site of reader occupation) appears in Cixous's 1974 essay "The Character of 'Character.'" Woloch's analysis identifies Cixous as among those theorists taking a formalist approach to characterization, resisting the pull toward anthropomorphic reading. He argues that Cixous and others believe that the "referential basis of character underlies a particular bourgeois notion of personhood" (16). While Cixous is definitely highly critical of referential approaches to character, the language that she uses to describe it suggest, not that the functional work of character is more important than implied personality, but that the necessary compression that occurs through character function does a disservice to the complexity of subjectivity. The terms in which she frames character are, in fact, strikingly similar to those she uses for the repressive ways in which feminine subjectivity is repressed in favor of a female hypercorporeality that offers a structural support for masculine consciousness. She juxtaposes subjectivity, in which she sees an inherent multiplicity and a productive chaos, against the hollow "character" into which subjectivity is pressed. The subject, outside of character, is "always more than one, diverse, capable of being all those it will at one time be, a group acting together, a collection of singular beings that produce the enunciation" (387). Like women, whom phallocentrism reduces from powerful polyvocality to forcible reflectors of men, when character takes over the subject trades its more positively valuated multiplicity for the "treadmill of reproduction," and the "mirroring" of the reader" (387). The emptiness of women's position within patriarchy resembles the hollowness of character. In character, there is only an effect of depth produced by the external features that function within the sign system of the text, the "monotonous machination that turns

every ‘character’ into a marionette”[53] (387). Acker’s treatment of character both capitalizes on the assumed inhabitability of character and female body and fights against the most limiting features of both.

[53] Like the “meat puppets” and “dolls” of *Neuromancer*, as well as the marionette Cixous refers to in *Prenoms de Personne*.

CHAPTER THREE

"SAFE ON THE OTHER SIDE AND HERE": COUPLEHOOD, CONTAINERS, AND THE LANGUAGE OF THE SUBJECT IN *CLEANSED*

They're all just in love. I actually thought it's all very sixties and hippy. They are all emanating this great love and need and going after what they need, and the obstacles in their way are all extremely unpleasant, but that's not what the play is about. What drives people is need, not the obstacle.

Sarah Kane on *Cleansed* (Saunders 91)

'I love you' flows away, is buried, drowned, burned, lost in a void. We'll have to wait for the return of 'I love.' Perhaps a long time, perhaps forever. Where has 'I love' gone? What has become of me? 'I love' lies in wait for the other. Has he swallowed me up? Spat me out? Taken me? Left me? Locked me up? Thrown me out? What's he like now? No longer (like) me? When he tells me 'I love you,' is he giving me back? Or is he giving himself in that form? His? Mine? The same? Another? But then where am I, what have I become?

Luce Irigaray (1985, 206)

Introduction: Love, Loss, and Embodiment

Barbara Kruger's 1992 lithograph, "Girl, Don't Die for Love," includes many of the trademark visual and thematic elements of the Riot Grrrl movement and the third wave feminist politics they reflect (figure 3*).*[54] Black blocks with white text—reminiscent of text cut from a magazine—slash at an angle across the image, where they abut, and sometimes fall over, a skeleton clutching a microphone in one hand, the other thrown high into the air as the skeleton sings. The text is a warning to an implied audience of women about the dangers of HIV transmission, and reads: "Girl / Don't be dumb / Don't be coy / Don't be intimidated / Don't think it can't happen to you / Do safer sex because AIDS kills / Don't die for love / For information, call[…]" followed by the number for the National AIDS Hotline. As a vehicle for its particular message to practice safer sex is an implied romantic narrative between two partners.

[54] Though Kruger's career spans the transition from second to third wave feminism, the reuse of this image in contemporaneous Riot Grrl publications make clear that, whether or not Kruger herself would identify it as third wave, third wave activists saw in this image something that spoke to their politics.

In its effort to empower the Girl to make safer choices for her body, the image implicitly shames a set of heavily gendered traits—including timidity and coyness—which are framed as likely to produce choices, like sex without protection, that would make her body vulnerable to HIV transmission. The largest blocks of text, "Girl," and "Don't die for love," yoke the bodily event of a virus's attack to a narrative of heterosexual courtship and the specific practices that narrative implies.[55] Love and the virus stand in for one another as both threaten the body and self of the image's addressee, as if the virus is simply one of many markers of the self-sacrifice to which heterosexual courtship has traditionally called women.

(Fig. 3: Kruger, *Girl Don't Die For Love*)

This bodily threat—of both love and the virus—is dramatically presented in the form of a singing skeleton, who might be read as either a figure of Death itself calling to the Girl, or as a prediction of the physical state she will be reduced to if the advice is unheeded. The loss of self-

[55] The gender identity of the Girl's partner is never discussed, and the implied relationship dynamics the image refers to could easily occur in a queer relationship as well. However, the specific cultural framing of women as dumb, coy, or susceptible to partner intimidation draw from heterosexual cisgender narratives, regardless of the individual gender identities of the partners that may display those traits.

implied in the romantic narrative underpinning the image is complemented by a nearly complete loss of body, calling to mind the contemporaneous sensationalization of the thin and struggling bodies of AIDS patients. The body in Kruger's lithograph angles itself as if it must escape the physical intrusion of the page's text, as if even the language used to describe this implicit romantic relationship is a physical threat to the body. The knees buckle to avoid touching the telephone number in the final text line, and the two lines that do intrude the body's space (as opposed to other lines that abut the body or lay wholly over it) deposit their words of warning directly into the skeleton's pelvis, a site where intercourse could potentially deposit the virus. The emotional self-sacrifice alluded to in the text has both a visual and a metaphorical tie to a bodily sacrifice, suggesting that both her emotional and her physical interior is threatened with invasion if she should choose to extend too much of herself in the direction of her partner.

This rhetorical connection between emotional and physical vulnerability takes on an even darker set of associations in Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse*, in which he compares the losses felt through love with the psycho-physical torture of concentration camp victims:

> The amorous catastrophe may be close to what has been called, in the psychotic domain, an extreme situation, 'a situation experienced by the subject as irremediably bound to destroy him'; the image is drawn from what occurred at Dachau. Is it not indecent to compare the situation of a love-sick subject to that of an inmate of Dachau? Can one of the most unimaginable insults of History be compared with a trivial, childish, sophisticated, obscure incident occurring to a comfortable subject who is merely the victim of his own Image-repertoire? Yet this two situations have this in common: they are, literally, panic situations: situations without remainder, without return: I have projected myself onto the other with such power that when I am without the other I cannot recover myself, regain myself: I am lost, forever. (48-49)

Barthes describes romantic love as if it were an uprooting of the self, to relocate, invest in, and "project" onto another. The presentation of this projection through a comparison to such physically brutal circumstances leads me to consider the implied embodiment of the lover himself, as if it is from his body that he has been uprooted. In dualist terms, he has perhaps removed the animating consciousness from his own body and relocated it beyond the boundary demarcated by that body. The point of comparison Barthes presses here[56] is that, for both the concentration camp victim and the lover, the body and/or self is no longer an available site of return; for the camp victim, the body itself has proven an unsafe place for the interior mind to reside, and for the lover, the body has been abandoned in favor of the beloved. Elaine Scarry suggests a similar loss, though arrived at very differently, for the victim of torture: "The goal of the torturer is to make that one, the body, emphatically and crushingly *present* by destroying it, and to make the other, the voice, *absent* by destroying it" (49). In this case, the body's inescapability—and inescapability of the pain it experiences—is matched by an absenting of the voice. By implication, the self (which Scarry describes as entering worldly embodiment via the voice) is no longer accessible, leaving the torture victim caged in the pain of their body with neither an exterior site to occupy nor any interior self to retreat to.

Barthes's lover and the concentration camp victim are each portrayed as uprooted, an uprooting that reinforces the Cartesian portrait of the body as a container for the subject and, by extension, figures interpersonal relationships as movement of the self beyond that container. Writing specifically about literary characters, Peter Brooks identifies that movement beyond (or extension of) the self as an expression of not only character ambition but also narrative desire:

[56] It is difficult to access to what extent Barthes's rhetorical posturing—posing the question of his comparison's propriety in a tone of mock-outrage—creates tension for the comparison that he nevertheless undertakes.

> "[Protagonists of the nineteenth century novel] may regularly be conceived as 'desiring machines' whose presence in the text creates and sustains narrative movement through the forward march of desire imagined and then acted upon. Etymology may suggest that the self creates a circle—an *ambitus*—or aureola around itself, mainly in front of itself, attempting ever to move forward to the circumference of that circle and to widen it, to cast the nets of the self ever further." (1984 40)

Brooks's discussion of the self's outward reach imagines a crossing of narrative boundaries, a desiring movement that is in fact part of the mechanics of what drives the story forward. Though he does not describe the material body of the character here, the fact that this model of narrative manifestation so closely resembles the rhetoric of extra-bodily investment through romantic desire creates room to consider these two kinds of expansion alongside one another. For a character to invest beyond themselves within the world of a literary text is to cross a material threshold that is at once bodily and literary. In my first two chapters I stressed the consequences of a material reading of textual bodies within the presentation of individual character interiors—here, I take a more explicitly relational approach to the same set of questions.

Barthes's passage served as part of the inspiration for Sarah Kane's 1998 play, *Cleansed*, in which a series of romantic relationships are dramatized through literal torture of the various lovers in a surreal university-cum-sanitorium. In several interviews, Kane specified that she was drawn to the Dachau reference as one that highlights love as a loss of self: "And when I read it I was just appalled and thought how could he actually suggest the pain of love is as bad as [Dachau]. But then the more I thought about it I thought I actually do know what he is saying. It's about the loss of self. And when you lose yourself where do you go? There's nowhere to go, it's actually a kind of madness" (Saunders 93). And indeed, by all appearances, many of the characters have lost parts of themselves by the end of the play, both through emotional traumas and through the literal amputation of body parts.

However, the play departs quite radically from the dualist description of the mind/body relationship that undergirds this rhetoric of extension and loss. As much as the play explores love as a loss, it does so alongside a presentation of subjectivity that alters the bodily economy by which both subjectivity and couplehood appear to function. C. Delgado-García states that "Indeed, in *Cleansed* subjectivity is alterity and not distinctiveness and self-sameness as liberal-humanist thought contends" (236). *Cleansed* both explores and, quite often, departs from a description of embodiment as containment of a single interior consciousness by a single exterior body, but instead imagines a more complex interpenetration of subjectivities and bodies, both within individual characters and across the spaces—emotional, material, literary—in which their relationships play out.

Kane, Feminism, Context

Cleansed is contemporaneous with the rise of third wave feminism, as well as the infusion of queer theory into poststructuralist feminism. Kane's work itself, however, was not initially read through a feminist lens. As part of the "In Yer Face" young guns of 1990s British drama, Kane was received alongside a set of mostly male contemporaries, often framed as the sole young woman whose plays were hard-hitting enough to permit her entrance into the literary boy's club. In interviews, Kane was incredibly reluctant to be read through her gender identity, "I have no responsibility as a woman writer because I don't believe there's such a thing"(Aston, 576). This is might be read as a disavowal of feminism, particularly in the context of the incredible violence—especially sexual violence—of her plays, a physical cruelty that has been difficult to recuperate though a feminist reading. Elaine Aston points to the delay with which feminist attention has been paid to Kane's drama (580), though it is notable that those critics who read Kane as feminist do so through an arguably third wave lens. Aston examines the way

Kane's drama exemplifies the loss of second wave feminism (and a reformulation of identity and sexuality in its wake). Kane's comment on women writers, in such readings, becomes a protest against the narrow cultural space into which women's writing is pressed, both though popular reception and through the pressures of second wave coalitions.

Sarah Kane's comment on her identity as a woman writer might be read further, in the spirit of its time, as a need to reexamine the category of womanhood, an examination that is itself necessitated by the fluid presentation of sex and gender in her own writing. The 1990s were a period of interrogation of womanhood as a political category in the wake of second wave feminism. Not only did some third wave feminists frame 1970s women's activism as an artificial solidarity that erased internal diversity and pushed queer women and women of color to the margins (necessitating a reevaluation of who the "women" in "women's liberation" could include), but the influence of postmodernism and poststructuralism also brought a distrust of unified subjectivity into the political discourse of feminist activism. As Clare Hemmings argues, in a discussion of the evolution of feminist cultural narratives: "In all versions of this story, postmodern and poststructuralist feminism are understood to mark a break from feminism proper through their attack on the category 'woman.'" One effect of this break, as Hemmings describes, is a perception of postmodernism and poststructuralism as "wholly abstract,"[57] which in turn created the foundation for narratives of the need to "return to 'the body'" (6-7). Natalie Fixmer and Julia T. Wood are explicit about the way that an interrogation of one's own subjectivity and subject position links to this investment in embodiment, examining texts that "advocate personal, bodily resistance to oppressive ideologies as a critical form of embodied politics. As if to echo

[57] I discussed some of the limitations of this reading of poststructuralism in the introduction of this dissertation, and Hemmings presents her description of it with a similar skepticism, raising it as part of a cultural narrative that does not necessarily reflect the actual course of intellectual life at the end of the century.

Sally Kempton's (1970) insight that 'it is hard to fight an enemy who has outposts in your head' (p. 57), many third wavers locate the beginnings of their struggle in themselves and in politicizing their bodies and voices. The body becomes a primary site for practicing personal resistance" (242). If the risks of love as described by Kruger and Barthes present a dislocated subject, whose now empty body leaves no site of return, the feminist historical context of Kane's reworking of that motif is one that, at times emphatically, calls for both a reintegration of the subject into the body and a parallel troubling of the nature of the subjects these bodies house.

An investment in differently examining the body requires us to reconsider the rhetoric that has described this body as subordinate to a singular animating will sited, somehow immaterially, in that body's interior. Writing specifically about the need to revisit intersectionality, though making a point that speaks to the broader imagining of the subject's internal composition, Jasbir Puar advocates for the use of "assemblage" as a way to look at embodiment and identity, in part because assemblages "de-privilege the human body as a discrete organic thing" (57). Kane's work exists right on this historical fault line between the assumption of such a "discrete organic thing" and the troubling—inside and outside the academy—of any such compositional unity. Couplehood in *Cleansed*, both as a literal interpersonal experience and *as a figure for the interior space of the subject itself*, reconfigures the self's relationship to body and language against the grain of Cartesian dualism and the bodily economies it undergirds.

Models of desire

Cleansed follows two couples as each is manipulated and tortured within the walls of a university that has, room by room, been repurposed to police their sexual identities and

emotional bonds. Overseen by the sadistic Tinker—half-doctor, half-drug-dealer—the couples each overcome cultural taboos[58] in their desire for each other, only to have the expressions of those desires punished by mutilation, sexual assault, and execution. In the first couple, Carl begs Rod for an emotional commitment Rod won't undertake. Seeing this attempt at commitment, Tinker has Carl beaten and rapes him with a pole (with a cruel pun on "rod," his lover's name) until Carl is willing to sacrifice his partner, after which Carl struggles to redeem himself to Rod even as the bodily means he would use to express his love (his tongue, his hands) are systematically cut off. In the second couple, Graham dies of a heroin overdose in the first scene—an overdose supplied to him by Tinker—and yet appears in multiple scenes afterwards as he enters an incestuous relationship with his grieving sister, Grace. Over the course of the play, Grace mimics Graham's physical movements, and is eventually surgically altered by Tinker (who has his own strange emotional attachment to Grace) to become anatomically male—her breasts are removed, and Carl's penis is amputated from him and attached to her. Interspersed among these two central plotlines are scenes between Tinker and the stripper he pretends is Grace, or between Grace and a young "patient" named Robin who wears Grace's clothes for most of the play. The play ends with Robin and Rod dead, with the still-dead (but somehow animate) Graham departed, with Tinker and the Woman lovingly coupled (against all logic), and with Grace and Carl holding one another, their bodies fresh from mutilations and surgeries, staring with an ambiguous peace and terror at the sunlight as it slowly brightens, burning out all detail but the sound of screeching rats.

[58] Various critics, and Kane herself, have offered this comparison of Carl/Rod and Grace/Graham as each negotiating taboo to be together. Though this comparison does not play a central role in my analysis, I think it important to note that comparing the taboo of homosexuality with the taboo of incest (and, arguably, necrophilia) is both surprisingly reductive and quite politically problematic.

Grace and Graham's relationship both picks up on and frustrates conventional models of desire, and the dualist understanding of the body that undergirds them. Grosz describes at length some of the problems of traditional (especially psychoanalytic) desire:

> "Now this notion of desire as an absence, lack, or hole, an abyss seeking to be engulfed, stuffed to satisfaction, is not only uniquely useful in capitalist models of acquisition, property, and ownership (seeing the object of desire on the model of the consumable commodity), it inherently sexualizes desire, coding it in terms of prevailing characteristics attributed to the masculine/feminine opposition—presence and absence. Desire, like female sexuality, is insatiable, boundless, relentless, a gaping hole, which cannot be filled or can be filled only temporarily; it suffers an inherent dependence on its object(s), a fundamental incompletion without them. I would suggest that this model of desire is in fact coded as a sexual polarization." (1995 177)

Grosz's examination of the implicitly gendered structure of desire, in which the negatively valuated traits like 'insatiability' and 'relentlessness' are coded feminine, strongly resembles her analysis of Cartesian dualist structures of the body/mind relationship. In the mind/body relationship, women are reduced to the biological, the hollow containers that house an animating, masculine mind. This model of desire capitalizes on the assumption of that hollowness, positioning women as the implicitly vaginal "gaping hole" that depends upon, can only be completed by, yet can never fully reach peace with, a complementing, intangible (and incorporeal) partner. Grosz describes the ultimately feminizing effect this model has on desire, one well reflected in the history of literature, which so often treats male protagonists' longing as a feminine weakness that must be remedied through a reassertion of masculine domination of that desire's object, to simultaneously possess it while stripping it of its perceived power to feminize.

Grace and Graham's relationship is built on a muddling of the material and the abstract, of the relationship between a corporeal exterior and an interior animating consciousness. In some ways, Graham plays the role of material body and Grace the role of consciousness. His name refers to a unit of physical measurement (gram) whereas hers refers to a spiritual state (grace), and it remains unclear whether she is the animating force behind Graham (i.e. whether she is hallucinating his presence). At the same time, hers is the body that carries the material weight of their relationship, as she uses first mimicry and then surgery to present her body as Graham's. They appear to create, as a couple, a composite and cooperative body and self, yet the roles they play in relation to that embodiment are difficult to pin down. Their relationship to bodily desire, as described by Grosz, is equally ambiguous. Grace's transformation of her own body into Graham's might be read as the ultimate attempt to possess the object of desire and integrate it into the form of the desiring body, to literally (re)instate masculinity at the seat of desire in the way so many other literary protagonists have done. At the same time, nowhere in the play does Grace's transformation into Graham operate in a way that suggests she negatively values her female body or her identity as Grace, and it remains unclear to what extent either of those remain legible to her as she undergoes this transformation. Rather, physically transforming into Graham is a means of contact, a relocation of sexual play within the space of a single body as well as across the space of multiple bodies.

Grace is explicit about the reasons for her transformation: she wants to look how she feels "Graham outside like Graham inside." When reflecting on Graham as a component of her body and self, she doesn't so much suggest that she identifies with and as Graham, but rather that he is "inside" her. To have Graham "inside" her, to use her body to envelop the two of them in a strange, shared subjectivity, positions Grace's existence as in and of itself a kind of penetration.

This transformation recreates *being* itself as a mode of sexual play; it, in a strange way, asserts a new materialist vitality to her bodily material as a site of becoming. Coole and Frost argue that "matter *becomes*" (10), and the matter of Grace's body "becomes Graham." As Grace undergoes her surgery, she and Graham reflect more directly on the sexual dynamic of this transformation; Grace says, "Like to feel you here," to which Graham responds, touching her body, "Always be here. And here. And here," describing her body's alteration as a means of receiving Graham's sexual contact, of having him always in her body. This transformation is not a merging of Grace into Graham, but a complicated incorporation of two subjects into the same body. In the play's final scene, when Grace's transformation is so complete as to warrant a renaming of character as Grace/Graham (suggesting, again, a subjectivity that is shared and internally heterogenous), Grace/Graham reflects on the pain of their relationship while still suggesting that it is incorporated into her/his body: "Here now. Safe on the other side and here." Referring to her/his body's location in a way that is both immediate and remote, Grace/Graham suggests a duality that locates the couple within the same body.

Though it remains unclear to what extent this play's thinking through of subjectivity congeals into an argument about it, it reflects important developments in late twentieth-century thinking about desire, relationality, and identity. Judith Butler points to the fact that a revision of autonomous selfhood necessitates a revision of the models of desire we have inherited from it:

> Let's face it. We're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something. If this seems so clearly the case with grief, it is only because it was already the case with desire. One does not always stay intact. […] It does not suffice to say that I am promoting a relational view of the self over an autonomous one, or trying to redescribe autonomy in terms of relationality. The term 'relationality' sutures the rupture in the relation we seek to describe, a rupture that is constitutive of identity itself. (2004 19)

Butler's description of grief is not one in which the self is lost by virtue of a lost love, but instead one in which identity is itself characterized by an interior rupture that locates a dynamic of loss and recovery within the subject itself. Butler creates an implicit comparison between the interior alterity of the subject and the distance that separates the subject from others. Division, rather than barring relation, is a component of relation, both within the subject and across the couple. More recent writing by Puar points to the dynamic interplays within the subject that frustrate the clear articulation of subject positions, because that clarity mistakenly presumes the ability to arrest the subject in a fixed position rather than to track its movements: "Subject positioning on a grid is never self-coinciding; positioning does not precede movement but rather it is induced by it; epistemological correctives cannot apprehend ontological becomings; the complexity of process is continually mistaken for a resultant product" (50). *Cleansed* itself uses desire to thematize the kind of interior rupture Butler describes, the resultant "never self-coinciding" position of the subject(s) within an individual body, and the shifting role of the body as a marker of the boundaries of the subject.

Cleansed and the Romance of Apostrophe

When Grace first sees her dead brother, Graham, sitting on the edge of her bed at the beginning of scene five, both she and the audience are confronted with a body that, by all accounts, was incinerated earlier in the play. As mentioned above, it's possible to read this as a simple hallucination by Grace—Graham is not listed as a character on stage in the initial stage directions, but instead is only noted at the moment Grace first sees him (he does not enter, she sees him already there), suggesting that it is only through her point of view that Graham can be apprehended. His body does not begin the scene, but manifests, in a play filled with paradoxical

manifestations that blur the line between the material and the abstract. It is immediately unclear whether their developing couplehood is taking place across the space of two separate, "real" bodies, or whether the bodies we see on the stage are externalizations that use couplehood as a figure for understanding the dynamics of Grace's own subjectivity—a means of embodying her interior. Their couplehood arises out of an immediate question: are the bodies on the stage demarcating distinct subjectivities or externalizing a single subjectivity, and—increasingly—to what extent are these two possibilities exclusive of one another?

This straddling of the divide between the material and the abstract positions their relationship as a bodily metaphor, one that is at once poetic and corporeal. The poetic device of apostrophe is an especially useful way to describe this relationship, as it offers a way to read a conversation whose partner is both there and not there. Barbara Johnson explores specifically the issue of life and death as it relates to apostrophe (particularly in poetry about abortion, but I think it speaks to death more broadly):

> Apostrophe is thus both direct and indirect: based etymologically on the notion of turning aside, of digressing from straight speech, it manipulates the I/Thou structure of direct address in an indirect, fictionalized way. The absent, dead, or animate entity addressed is thereby made present, animate, and anthropomorphic. Apostrophe is a form of ventriloquism through which the speaker throws voice, life, and human form into the addressee, turning its silence into mute responsiveness. (30)

Like the apostrophic addressee of poetry, Graham appears summoned to the stage by Grace's need to speak with him; he is animated by her in the way Johnson describes, and that animation plays with a larger dualist rhetoric that figures his body as the dead matter that is given life by Grace's enlivening spark. His animation is linked only to Grace – the other characters do not address him, and only once does another character see him (and only does so at the moment of

suicide, as if death itself is what allows the sighting). When others appear with this couple onstage, Graham only speaks through lines identical to what living characters are saying, speaking simultaneously with them—and after a fashion, through them, creating "direct address in an indirect, fictionalized way."

The apostrophic addressee appears always through words (and, in this case, through a body) that place it in relation to the speaker. As Grace and Graham interact, their bodily relationship shifts and changes as their identities become more obviously co-constitutive, as their embodiments act as reference to and for their beloved:

> *Pause. They look at each other in silence.*
>
> **Graham** More like me than I ever was.
>
> **Grace** Teach me.
>
> *Graham dances – a dance of his love for Grace.*
> *Grace dances opposite him, copying his movements. Gradually, she takes on the masculinity of his movement, his facial expression. Finally, she no longer has to watch him – she mirrors him perfectly as they dance exactly in time.*
> *When she speaks, her voice is more like his.* (119)

Over the course of this scene, Grace and Graham's romance is played out alongside their oscillations between identicality and alterity, blurring the line between desiring the other and being the self. Grace's desire for Graham is expressed through a mimicry that allows her to take on his physical attributes, and as they resume speaking she offers only repetitions of his words, like Echo to his Narcissus (a powerful, if slippery, point of comparison for the progress of their relationship), until he finally stops and confesses "I never knew myself, Grace." It is unclear how Grace's desire and identity intermingle at this moment; as she takes on Graham's exterior form, how is she relating this practice to her own internal composition? Does Grace's bodily

performance as Graham present a disjuncture between bodily container and subjective interior, or a corrective realignment? Perhaps her desire is to become Graham (and stop being Grace), which would suggest that part of her confusion after Graham says, "I never knew myself, Grace," comes from Graham's addressing her by name, as a person distinct from himself. On the other hand, perhaps her incorporation of his physical particularities can be part of a desire practice that still retains Grace at its core, as suggested by the fact the dance she so perfectly imitates is one already oriented toward Grace, as a "dance of [Graham's] love for Grace." Delgado-García argues that a heteronormative reading of Grace's transformation would suggest that the "merging" of these two characters "would bring to an end the dysfunctional correlation between a female body and a male presentation." It would, in other words, give her self an appropriate corporeal home (versus, as Barthes's description of love suggests, a self with no bodily home to return to). But Grace's transformation is one that specifically cites, not a merging of one into the other, but a co-presence of both Grace and Graham in an eroticized embodiment that is built upon, rather than threatened by, dislocations and discontinuities:

> However, her confession that she would change her body so it finally looks like it feels inside (126) reveals Grace's need to become *him* to actually become *herself*. Rather than expressing "foolish wishes" (Saunders, *"Love"* 96), her words are a testament to the otherness that lies at the core of the self, the impossibility of a self-identical identity that Butler explains in terms of the melancholic nature of gender and sexuality. (236)

The heteronormative reading Delgado-García outlines is one that has, as its underpinning, a Cartesian dualism that is disrupted by the "otherness that lies at the core of the self" that Grace's transformation performs. The queering Kane performs in *Cleansed* exists not just in the presentation of non-heterosexual couplehood, but in this provocative description of selfhood as non-unitary, as erotically heterogeneous.

This interior alterity is even more pronounced if we read this relationship as an apostrophe, whether or not (but especially if) that apostrophe is also read as hallucinated. In that case, Grace is participating in a quasi-self-address through the conduit of Graham's apostrophically manifested body, and her exploration of his body's movements is therefore still a part of the mechanics of Grace herself. Graham then represents the alterity within Grace, the speaking partner of her self-address. When Graham comments that Grace is more him than he himself ever was, Grace might be appraising her own body through both the manifested conduit of her brother's voice as well as through its relationship to her brother's body as a basis of comparison. No matter which reading strategy one takes, it is impossible to read Grace and Graham's desire for one another apart from the way they appear to be written into each other, accommodated into the space of one another's bodies and identities. Their couplehood does not then demonstrate an attempted merging of two into one, but instead highlights the intrasubjective heterogeneity by which Grace's one was already two—was already, inside Grace, both a self and other.

Loving against loss

Revising a dualist description of embodied subjectivity in this portrait of couplehood makes necessary an accompanying revision of the threat of loss that love implies, which Kane herself cited as an important entry point for her work on this play. Grace and Graham's relationship, in some ways, definitely makes reference to the kinds of self-loss Barthes describes when writing "I have projected myself onto the other with such power that when I am without the other I cannot recover myself, regain myself: I am lost, forever" (49). Rather than rejecting this kind of loss outright, Kane addresses these conventions by literalizing them to absurd and

frightening degrees, by rendering this metaphorical loss as a simultaneously material one. Grace's mimicry and eventual assumption of Graham's physical form, for example, may leave her no physical or subjective site of return should her love with Graham fail. There are plenty of cues in the play to support such a reading: by the end, Grace is confronted with two separate characters forced to wear her clothes, proxies for the identity she may be leaving behind. The first of those proxies (Robin) commits suicide and the other (Carl) ends the play mutilated and bereft—his limbs, tongue, and penis have all be cut off, the last of these surgically attached to Grace. Both are dramatizations of Grace's transformation as a possible loss of self, performed at an uncomfortable juncture between the abstract and the material.

Graham is threatened with a different kind of loss, one derived from his body's status as dead matter that may or may not be animated by Grace. As Grace takes on his attributes, there remains a painful question of whether he is still necessary, whether his body is now rendered somehow redundant. Hints of this possibility appear in his comment that Grace is "more like me than I ever was," and it may be part of the reason why Graham exits the play for good shortly after Grace completes her surgical transformation into Graham. Does her assumption of his bodily attributes leave his own body empty of meaning? Such an emptying out is not only a common trope in romantic narratives (albeit, appearing through implication rather than literal bodily transformation), but it is a feature of apostrophic address as well. On Baudelaire's "Moesta et Errabunda," Johnson notes, "The poem seems to empty itself of all its human characters and voices, acting out a loss of animation – which is in fact its subject: the loss of childhood aliveness brought about by the passage of time. The poem thus enacts in its own temporality the loss of animation it situates, in the temporality of the speaker's life" (Johnson 30). Grace's animation of Graham, first through the appearance of his body and then through the

transformation of her own, seems at times to dramatize the lover's union with each other as a loss of one another.

Yet both of these threats register only through a bodily economy whereby the discrete subject is contained within a single body, and the venturing out beyond those boundaries that romance seems to imply leaves open the risk of having no body/self to return to, or the risk of having that self/body taken over by another who leaves no room for us. Each of these examples also has, however, an element of shared corporeality that disrupts this economy. For example, the two "Graces" that are lost in this play are presented only in the bodies of other characters. Rather than suggesting that these two characters only function as stand-ins for Grace (though this is absolutely part of what they do), I believe they offer glimpses of bodies that are inhabited cooperatively, disrupting the discrete containment on which the self-loss through love is premised. Further, to the extent that Robin, for example, stands in for Grace, he does so always still in relation to her: he wears her clothes even as he professes his desire to be with her. Taking this Robin and Grace together, rather than Robin alone, as a figure for Grace's subjectivity, we find another would-be couple who interact with one another across the shared space of a body marked as Grace's. Robin, like Grace, uses his body to perform contact with her (though in a way that is less dramatic than Grace, in part because dressing like her is something he has been compelled to do by Tinker). This is the kind of shared subjectivity Grace seeks with Graham, in which she might somehow house both of them within her body/self, in an internally heterogeneous, sexualized selfhood. Graham suggests a similarly heterogeneous version of both the couple and the individual self when he confesses to Grace "I never knew myself." Within Graham as a subject, there is sufficient distance between the knowing and known selves that the first can attempt to apprehend the other, and sufficient interior alterity that such an attempt can

be unsuccessful. His lack of union with himself demonstrates that their couplehood, no matter how similar they become, has otherness as part of its necessary internal composition.

Feminist Interiors

This kind of interior separation and otherness, both between members of a couple and within the subject itself, is a complicated structure of relational embodiment that reflects contemporaneous developments in poststructuralist feminist theory. Published in Italian[59] a year before *Cleansed* (and translated to English just three years after it), Irigaray's *To Be Two* takes up many of these same concerns about the intra- and intersubjective divisions that characterize romantic partnership. Irigaray writes: "Who I am for you and who I am for me is not the same, and such a gap cannot be overcome. We are irreducible in us, between us, and yet so close. Without this difference, how do we give each other grace, how do we see each other, the one in the other?" (2001 9-11). The gap Irigaray explores at this moment is not the space separating the lovers—though she takes this up at length, and it certainly affects how this particular passage plays out—but between two versions of the same "I," one that is oriented toward/apprehended by the self and one that is oriented toward/the object of interest for the other member of the couple: "who I am for me" and "who I am for you." In exploring the heterogeneity inherent in romantic partnership (inherent, because couples do not dissolve into oneness entirely), Irigaray makes a simultaneous argument about the heterogeneity of the individual subject as felt across the space of a couple. Desire for the partner does not give one direct access to their self as they understand it (though it can certainly be part of a dynamic that allows glimpses, if imperfectly, into the other's experience); desire is not the same as knowledge. And yet, such knowledge seems,

[59] Irigaray's choice to write *Essere Due* in Italian rather than French is an interesting one, though beyond the scope of this project.

paradoxically, available via the irreconcilability of "who I am for you" and "who I am for me," in that it allows us to see "the one in the other." Irigaray's distance does not present members of the couple as discrete, autonomous units; it instead creates a cooperative, relational identity across the couple, by which each self is crucial to the presentation of the other. The lover's bodies, then, act not as solid boundaries containing each subject, but as *conduit surfaces of contact*, or as textures within a larger co-subjectivity, one defined not by internal unity but by dynamic alterity.

Irigaray also puts pressure on the body as a medium of both subjectivity and desire: "Already, beauty creates a distance: a veil over us. It seems a radiation of light softened by the flesh: a guardianship of you, of me, a repose for us and between us. It is not an incitement to go outside of the self, but it is a gathering in the self." (2001 8) Here Irigaray builds an analogous relationship between flesh and the veil/distance, which are intervening elements that facilitate, while structuring, beauty/radiation of light. In some ways, this appears to adhere to a more conventional model of the body as the container for the self, in which flesh is the barrier between a private interior experience and the partner who might want access to that interiority. At the same time, the flesh doesn't bar access to light, it softens it, in a way that leads to "a guardianship of you." This moves away from a model of embodiment that places the flesh as the subordinate communicator of interior will, by suggesting a relational interplay between the body and its own interior. Irigaray also reframes desire here by such a model of incorporation, positioning it not as "an incitement to go outside the self" but a "gathering in of the self," revising the version of love presented in the Kruger and Barthes examples at the beginning of this chapter.

“Looks like it sounds”: Language and Narrative as Containers

The play’s concern with the material body as a container for the self runs parallel to an interest in the materiality of text. After Barthes, Brooks writes: “Barthes seems to say that the symbolic field and the body at some point converge: that meaning, especially meaning conceived as the text’s self-representations—its representations of what it is and what it is doing—takes place in relation to the body, and that we are forever striving to make the body into a text” (1993 6-7). In addition to making the body into a text, Kane’s play makes the text into a body. Partly, this is a feature of drama as a genre—the textuality of a play includes the movements of actors who physically occupy the space of the stage. In interviews, Kane is explicit about her use of violence, not simply as an attempt to shock, but as a way of asking the body to carry the play’s meaning. Referring to the scene in which Carl’s hands are cut off, she remarks, “It’s not about the actual chop. It’s about that person who can no longer express love with his hands” (Saunders 89). Throughout the play, running parallel with an exploration of the body as a potential container for the self (as well as the limitations of that model of subjectivity), is a meditation on language’s ability to similarly contain a meaning and accurately reflect its own contents. The play engages both text and body as actors in metaphor itself, refusing to position either as wholly abstract or wholly material.

When teaching Robin how to write, Grace tells him to write “so you think it looks how it sounds” (123). This instruction, to find a correspondence between the visual material of letterforms and the object to which they refer, is worded similarly to Grace’s later assertion that she would like to change her body “So it looks how it feels. Graham outside like Graham inside” (126). The fact that the word Robin is writing is “Grace” further establishes a connection between language and body as containers that reflect their contents—in this case, the content of

both is Grace herself. The correspondence that Grace "feels" between her incorporation of Graham into her own self and the form of her body as that self's container is implicitly juxtaposed against other containers or roles offered her in this scene (126-127). Robin suggests two possible roles she might play in relation to him—mother and girlfriend—neither of which she feels comfortable inhabiting. In addition to the more abstract containment of social roles, Grace's phrasing, in its reminiscence of "So you think it looks how it sounds" implicitly compares her body's ability to reflect its contents with the written word's ability to do the same. Indeed, immediately after declaring her desire to change her body so that it "looks like it feels. Graham outside like Graham inside," Grace reminds Robin that he needs to return to writing, to finding his own, in this case verbal, container for "Grace." Grace itself, as a reference to both divine benevolence as well as an inherent quality "having its seat in the soul" puts pressure on the tension between meanings externally conferred and meanings arising from the interior (www.oed.com).

Graham's position in language is also an important part of this scene. As in several other scenes, Graham only speaks in unison with other characters. When speaking alongside Robin, he voices his desire for Grace, as when they both compliment her body. When speaking alongside Grace, he reifies the borders of Grace's position and the boundaries of her relationship with Robin. Robin asks to kiss Grace, because she is the only girl available to kiss in the sanitorium, and Grace responds that she isn't really a girl, to which Robin says "I don't mind" and both Grace and Graham say, "I do" (126-127). In his oscillation between speaking with Robin and speaking with Grace, Graham ends up playing two halves of a conversation, between Grace (dressed in Graham's clothes) and Robin (dressed in Grace's clothes)—he can only speak through a conversation that, in visual form, takes place between Grace and "herself." Graham's

lines have power, in part, through their tonal differences from the characters with whom he speaks; when saying "I do," he agrees with Grace's dismissal of Robin's suit, and yet his line registers very differently from hers—as a jealous lover, rather than a subject asserting the right to self-definition (as Grace is doing). Just as the body, throughout the play, is host to multiple subjectivities that internally vary and continually interact, these words, too, are occupied by multiple speakers and their multiple meanings.

Irigaray's early arguments on language concern primarily the effect of a phallocentric bodily economy on the act of representation. Arguing that our present use of language has as its foundation as privileging of masculinity, and, with it, an attendant reduction of the feminine to the body, she also describes language's relationship to the feminine in a way that evokes entrapment not simply in fleshly bodies, but in linguistic ones: "Words will pass through our bodies, above our heads. They'll vanish, and we'll be lost. Far off, up high. Absent from ourselves: we'll be spoken machines, speaking machines. Enveloped in proper skins, but not our own. Withdrawn into proper names, violated by them. Not yours, not mine. We don't have any" (*This Sex Which Is Not One* 205). This description of both body and language works as a critique of the figuration of the body as a vessel for animating consciousness, though here the passive machinery to which the feminine is relegated exists in language as well. Irigaray's later work, which shifts from a critique of this model of embodiment and toward the proposal of alternate models,[60] similarly repositions language. As she begins to more fully articulate a theory of intersubjectivity, otherness, and intimacy, Irigaray advances the notion of language within relationships as a form of touching, focusing on an adaptation of "caress"[61] as "a gesture-word

[60] This is not to say that her early work is without such alternate models. Her discussion of the "two lips" are an obvious example of an economy of representation that differently positions the female body, and her later work in some ways acts as an elaboration of these earlier, more hopeful moments.
[61] This is a term she shares with Lévinas, though she is quick to note her departure from his particular usage (24-28).

which penetrates into the realms of intimacy with the self in a privileged space time" (2001 26). Irigaray ultimately paints a picture of intersubjectivity as a state in which word and flesh do not act as vessels subordinate to the contents that give them meaning, but instead facilitate flow between intermingled elements.

As much as Kane's play reproduces a model of language that, like the body, functions to enclose its contents, she also suggests that meaning leaks out of these containers. When Robin is asked to write Grace's name so that it "looks like it sounds," he works steadily on his paper, and at the scene's end the audience sees that he has been inscribing, not letter forms, but a drawing of a flower. This flower is a call-back to the end of Grace and Graham's first scene together, in which the stage direction reads, "*They begin to make love, slowly at first, then hard, fast, urgent, finding each other's rhythm is the same as their own. They come together. They hold each other, him inside her, not moving. A sunflower bursts through the floor and grows above their heads. When it is fully grown,* **Graham** *pulls it toward him and smells it*" (120). Out of the felt correspondences of their sexual play, in which they discover they have the same "rhythm" and they orgasm "together," comes the physical impossibility of the flower. The eruption of this live plant speaks to the reanimation of Graham's body, as well as to a general vitality of matter along the lines of what would later be championed by new materialist critics. The appearance of the two flowers, one bursting from the stage and one manifesting on the page, emphasize a material vitality to the play itself as a textual product, one whose physicality can be bound neither by the constraints of the written word, nor by the rules imposed on the body, nor even by the bodily event of death.

Bodies Act, Speech Acts

Graham's simultaneous lines, uttered with other characters who appear not to see him (except for Grace), offer one way of introducing a multiplicity into language akin to the play's presentation of multiplicity within bodies and subjects. For example, it his "I do," in response to Robin's "I don't mind" in the latter's suit for Robin's affections, states an objection to Robin and Grace's potential relationship only, whereas Grace's utterance of the same line combines a simultaneous romantic rejection of Robin with a disavowal of her status as a "girl" (127). These separate meanings have an interesting overlap in intention and effect: they both are preventing Robin from accessing Grace. What Graham minds is the idea of Robin having physical intimacy with Grace, what Grace minds is Robin's reading her as a "girl." In each instance, it is bodily familiarity they deny to Robin, in part because Grace's body is the site of her and Graham's intimacy with one another. This intimacy is implied by yet another meaning in their simultaneous words: without intending to do so, Grace and Graham have just practiced a union with one another through utterance of the word "I do," placing this scene as a sort of accidental marriage ceremony.

This is, in fact, not the first accidental "I do" exchange of the play. During a conflict about whether or not to exchange rings with one another, Carl and Rod disagree over the obligations to which such a gesture would commit them. When Rod declares "I can't promise you anything," Carl protests "I don't mind,"[62] to which Rod responds "I do" (110). At the end of the scene, Rod reaffirms their lack of a strong commitment, by commanding Carl "Don't trust me," which Carl disobeys, uttering his own "I do" before they kiss (111-112). While the words exchanged between Carl and Rod are more explicitly compared to marriage (by virtue of the kiss

[62] Note that "I don't mind" is also the same line Robin utters, to which Grace and Graham both reply "I do."

and the exchange of rings) both this scene and Grace and Graham's unified "I do" show characters accidentally performing a speech act that does not reflect the immediate intentions of their words, and yet, still, appears to be in correspondence with the love they do share for each other.

J.L. Austin argues that for a speech act, such as the "I do" of a marriage ceremony, to be successful, it has to be supported by a structuring context that gives those words meaning as an action:

> But we are apt to have a feeling that their being serious consists in their being uttered as (merely) the outward and visible sign, for convenience or other record or for information, of an inward spiritual act: from which it is but a short step to go on to believe or to assume without realizing that for many purposes the outward utterance is a description, *true or false*, of the occurrence of the inward performance. […] Yet he provides Hippolytus with a let-out, the bigamist with an excuse for his 'I do' and the welsher a defence for his 'I bet.' Accuracy and morality are on the side of plain saying that *our word is our bond*. (9-10)

Rod and Carl do not intend their words to bring them into marriage, and yet the exchange of rings and the kiss fulfill much of the context by which their "I do"s would have cultural meaning. What is especially interesting, in both the scene between Carl and Rod and the one between Grace and Graham, is that their statements, while not intended as demonstrations of their commitment to each other as part of a marriage ceremony, are yet intended as demonstrations of that commitment within the more casual context of the conversation. Even as Rod's "I do" is a dismissal of Carl's suit, it is a dismissal based on Rod's wish to avoid any verbal contract that feels to him infelicitous—it is a statement of his commitment to tell the truth to Carl that he refuses a promise not to lie. In this way, their words and the context in which they say them perform *for* both couples. They are felicitous despite themselves.

More complicated, still, is the way these pseudo-performative speech acts are framed within the performance space of the physical stage. W. B. Worthen notes:

> Austin was skeptical about stage performance, noting that 'a performative utterance will, for example, be in a peculiar way hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, spoken in soliloquy'; utterance 'in such circumstances is in special ways – intelligibly – used not seriously, but in ways parasitic upon its normal use – ways which fall under the doctrine of the *etiolations* of language.' For Austin, the theatrical scene hollows out the agency of words […] (25).

The reference to hollowness here echoes Austin's discussion of partially unsuccessful speech acts, in which a non-correspondence between intent and speech nevertheless creates an act, but one which is less than fully inhabited by its participant and still needs completion: "On the other hand, in [some] cases, we speak of our infelicitous act as 'professed' or 'hollow' rather than 'purported' or 'empty', and as not implemented, or not consummated, rather than as void or without effect" (16). Framing theatrical speech with the same metaphor used to discuss infelicitous speech in general, Austin invokes a surface/depth model for both. The material words, as well as the materiality of the structuring context, that do not contain an abstract intention are infelicitous by virtue of a hollowness akin to a material body without an animating interior spirit. Yet, as Austin argues, such hollowness is not emptiness; he makes clear that these speech acts, incomplete though they may be, still have effect, can still be felt.

The "accidental" marriages in *Cleansed*, too, can be felt, though their consequences manifest in terrifying and challenging ways. For each couple, their next staged scene following their vow exchange opens with one of the characters being beaten by "an unseen group of men" whose bodies are invisible, but whose presence we infer from the result of their violence on the bodies of Carl and Grace, respectively. In both cases, the violence is framed as a punishment for

the relationships these characters have entered into via their accidental speech acts. They are punished, not because of those acts' infelicity, but because of their success; each beating is intended to break the bond that has been forged within each couple. The invisible men are, in a way, a theatrical manifestation of the speech act itself, here to police the characters whose words of commitment have more power than the invisible men can tolerate. The audience hears their language but does not see their bodies, and their character name in the stage direction is simply "Voices" (rather than, for example, Invisible Men). They are language, manifested and yet unseen, and their physical brutality suggests an undeniable material consequence for the vow exchanges performed by both couples.

Graham attempts to help Grace survive her beating at the "hands" of the voices by coaching her to disconnect from her body, in effect, leave her body hollow as her subjectivity projects elsewhere. This is similar to the kind of dislocation Barthes describes in his discussion of Dachau, but it presents here not as the consequence of love, but as a means of surviving the punishment that follows love (rather than figuring love itself as the punishment). As Graham coaches her, the Voices mock Graham and Grace's conversation with one another:

Graham Switch off your head. That's what I did. Shoot up and switch off before the pain moves in. I thought of you.

There is a flurry of blows which Grace's body reacts to, but she does not make a sound.

Graham I used to put my spoon in my tea and heat it up. When you weren't looking press it on your skin at the top of your arm and you'd (crack) scream and I'd laugh. I'd say Do it to me.

Grace Do it to me.

Graham You'd press a hot spoon on me I'd not feel a thing.

Knew it was coming.
If you know it's coming you're prepared.
you know it's coming –

Grace It's coming.

The blows come.
Grace*'s body moves – not with pain, simply with the force of the blow.*

Graham You can surf it.

Voices Do it to me
Shag the slag

Grace *is raped by one of the* **Voices**
looks into **Graham***'s eyes throughout.*
Graham *holds her head between his hands.*

Voices Gagging for it
Begging for it
Barking for it
Arching for it
Aching for it
She's gone?
Not a flicker

Graham *presses his hands onto* **Grace** *and her clothes turn red where he touches, blood seeping through. Simultaneously, his own body begins to bleed in the same places.* (132)

Whereas Graham's lines in the last scene were all voiced in unison with other characters, in this scene Grace repeats Graham's words after the fact, in what appears to be a dual reference to the verbal doubling Graham performed and the mimicry (in word and in body) she herself performed during the dance scene. Additionally, Graham's comments that "I thought of you" when doing heroin and "I used to" push a heated spoon against Grace's body repeat the words with which he strained to articulate his desire during their sex scene: "I used to . . . think about you and . . . I used to . . . wish it was you when I . . . Used to . . ." (120). These verbal repetitions, by single

characters and between couples, offer more moments in which the same words contain multiple implications, and they do so as Graham discusses the same bodily sensation (the heat of the spoon) registering in multiple ways.

These repetitions are mocked by the Voices, who perform their own verbal repetitions as a component of their violence when they repeat Grace's "Do it to me" right before raping her. The violence performed on Grace's body is reinforced by a kind of verbal violence, both through this horrible repetition of her own words, and through the language punctuating her attack as its subtle changes perform a kind of phonemic working over, as if the two letter shift from "gagging" to "begging" or the strained rhyme that pushes "barking" to "arching" constitute the slow physical damage done to the words themselves. This is reminiscent of Scarry's description of physical torture, in which the torturer causes so much damage to the victim that the latter experiences his own body as "the agent of his agony" (47). Here, language is similarly warped, forcibly wrenched from its original purpose until it both represents the damage performed on Grace's body and is itself reconfigured as a weapon against her commitment with Graham. In addition to violating the language by which their couplehood is expressed, the Voices' rape of Grace is also a violence against her body as a site of her couplehood with Graham, since she seeks throughout the play to incorporate Graham into her body, such that her body's own materiality continually manifests their sexual and romantic connection. The Voices' corporeal incorporeality also acts as a counterpoint to Graham's own paradoxical presence on the stage, and their invisible occupation of her body through the rape is a forcible revision of Graham's own position as part of her corporeality. In the material of both language and flesh, and especially where the seemingly abstract elements of both embodiment and language assert their materiality, the Voices try to undo Grace and Graham's couplehood through a monstrous

rearticulation of it.

Conclusion

One reason Alex Sierz expresses a preference for the term "In Yer Face" to describe the work of Kane and her contemporaries is that phrase's reference to the drama as an invasion of audience space:

> Unlike other names, such as 'New Brutalism', which have been used to characterise these plays, in-yer-face theatre describes not just the content of a play but rather the relationship between the stage and the audience. In other words, it strongly suggests what is particular about the experience of watching extreme theatre – the feeling of your personal space being threatened or violated (58).

This comment is oriented toward the more violent and disturbing qualities of plays like *Cleansed*, but it also leaves open the possibility of the play's strange hopefulness[63] about emotional intimacy also entering our "personal space." *Cleansed* plays with the idea of love as a boundary crossing, one that not only challenges our emotional limits but which traverses the material enclosure of subjects in their bodies or the neat confinement of meaning in language. Love leaks, bursts out, penetrates, damages, renews; love is a flower that erupts through the floorboards. Sierz suggests a similar eruption within the dramaturgical position of plays like Kane's, as if the final boundary the text crosses is the one separating the audience from the text itself. It forces us to ask to what extent we, as an audience, are included in the kinds of cooperative embodiment the play performs, and how this positioning reevaluates our own relationship to the line between the material and the abstract. This play manifests the emotional trials of love in the body itself; its own action obeys Grace's command to create something that "looks how it feels." In the next chapter, I'll examine another text that challenges its audience to

[63] For an example, see this chapter's epigraph.

ride the line between abstract concept and material manifestation, one that, even more than *Cleansed*, reconfigures the presentation of embodiment away from a dualist model.

CHAPTER FOUR

"I FOUND MYSELF INSIDE HIM": GROSS NARRATIVES AND ROUTES TO THE HUMAN IN *THE MELANCHOLY OF ANATOMY*

> Try drawing a human figure from life, following its outline faithfully all the way around. Take another piece of paper and draw the shape of the negative space around the figure. These drawings ought to be exactly the same. But are they? The first is often a general impression, only as good as the artist's preconceived ideas about the human body, while the second is intricate, specific, and exact. By looking closely at something we don't know—the negative space—we learn the truth about the thing, the figure, that we thought we knew.
>
> Any figure is also the negative space of the rest of the universe however. The universe, while it may extend outward in all directions to the exhaustion of the visual imagination, can certainly be imagined pressing inward against the figure in a precisely delimited curve—the very one you drew. That humble curve, then, is the very outline of the universe, and depicts that universe most precisely when it cleaves most closely to the figure, however small a fragment of the whole that figure may be.
>
> In fact, the smaller the fragment, the more of the universe it contains. Maybe this is true of writing as well.
>
> -Shelley Jackson, "9/11 and the Numberless New Yorks"

Dehumanization: The Matter with Death

In Meditation II, Descartes tests the relationship between his mind's ability to apprehend the physical world and his dependence upon the medium of his own body, a dependence which, as his argument progresses, is progressively painted as unreliable. He reaches the conclusion that what he is best able to apprehend is his working mind itself, untouched by the errors and inconsistencies of the sensorial body. To elucidate those errors and inconsistencies, he describes what it is like to look at the hats and cloaks passing below his window, describing how he might

go about determining that these are human beings. He deduces their humanity by an act of his mind, but argues that his faculty of sight is not itself enough to make this judgment:

> I should forthwith be disposed to conclude that the wax is known by the act of sight, and not by the intuition of the mind alone, were it not for the analogous instance of human beings passing on in the street below, as observed from a window. In this case I do not fail to say that I see the men themselves, just as I say that I see the wax; and yet what do I see from the window beyond hats and cloaks that might cover artificial machines, whose motions might be determined by springs? (*Meditation II*)

Though his argument principally concerns his own mind, the example of the men in the street below him raises a different set of questions. As much as he depends upon his own mind to supply the final determination of their humanity, that humanity itself is contingent[64] upon each of those men having a mind of their own, without which they are not differentiable from whatever bodies—fleshly or mechanical—their hats and cloaks may be covering. The men's bodies cannot reliably communicate interior consciousness, nor can Descartes's body reliably apprehend it. Descartes's description of perception works under the constant threat that the body's fleshly fallibility will impede the work of thought, that the animating consciousness by which true humanity could be judged will be swallowed up by the dead substance of men's flesh. The material body presented here carries with it the terrifying promise of dehumanization, a state (I'll argue) so like death that the two cannot be reliably differentiated.

Notwithstanding the considerable theoretical strides away from Cartesian dualism by thinkers in the late twentieth century, the twenty-first begins with this confluence of bodily

[64] I'm referring to humanity as conceived within a Cartesian framework that posits an animating mind as that which confers humanity. As I'll suggest in this chapter, there are other ways to think about humanity and agency outside of this framework.

matter, dehumanization, and death still operating powerfully in popular consciousness. Two seemingly dissimilar examples from early twenty-first century film and media demonstrate the extent to which the body's materiality is read as dehumanizing, as propelling itself in an inevitable trajectory away from animation and toward death. The first is a scene from Steven Spielberg's 2001 film *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*, in which protagonist David—a robot child who has been programmed to love the adoptive family that has since abandoned him—sits at the edge of a skyscraper. He quietly mutters, "Mommy," leans forward, and falls. The audience watches his small body quietly tumbling through the air, down the long, vertical lines of the building (figure 4). Less than three months later, the U.S. media landscape was briefly saturated with images of a different falling body: an anonymous victim of the attacks on the World Trade Center. However, as quickly as this image entered circulation, it was left behind; among the many photographs of horror, destruction, and death, it was this single image of a body quietly falling from the north tower that was deemed too disturbing for public consumption (figure 5).

(Fig. 4: Spielberg, *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*, left. Fig. 5: Drew, "The Falling Man," right)

I place these two examples alongside each other cautiously, in part because of the intensity with which the 9/11 attacks understandably still register in U.S. cultural consciousness. In exploring the relationship between matter, death, and dehumanization in what has been dubbed the "Falling Man" photograph, I run the risk of being perceived as compounding that dehumanization by comparing this image to a film. It is worth pausing to note the way that the act of comparison itself has, depending on the other object of comparison, a tendency to dehumanize. By focusing on a few discreet qualities that are shared between two objects, comparison runs the risk of erasing the particularities that fall outside the basis of the comparison. In this case, since I am about to argue that each of these images suggests a correlation between death and (the reduction to) matter, I ignore the aspects of these images that supposedly exist outside of the material. The very rhetoric around materiality that I take as my critical object also places my critique in the position of potentially performing the very dehumanization I describe.

In both the images of David and of the Falling Man, the *matter* of their bodies communicates an inevitability of death. David does not jump, but simply leans forward and allows the weight of his body to pull him down—in one respect, the body itself is his attempted murderer, while he is passive in the face of its work. Though it is unclear whether the Falling Man knowingly jumped from the tower or was unable to see that he was about to fall from it, the New York City medical examiner's office ruled that all deaths on September 11, 2001 were homicides, including those of individuals who jumped from the buildings. By implication, these leaps were deemed, not active choices, but the completion of murders the victims' bodies were already in the process of experiencing; once the planes hit, their murder was already underway, no matter how much longer they remained biologically alive. Tom Junod, author of the *Esquire*

article that first dubbed the photograph "Falling Man" (this article was later expanded into a feature-length documentary) refers to the photograph as "an unmarked grave," equating the man's anonymity with the death he is about to experience, or is already experiencing, as a "man buried inside [the image's] frame" (2003). Mel Chen, when speaking about dehumanization, argues that "perhaps the most unsparing dehumanization is an approximation toward death" (43), and I believe that the deathliness of this image is read as obscene because of that very (in this case, inadvertent) dehumanization it performs. One reason that the photograph is so unsettling is that the body in it is perceived as somehow alive and dead at the same time, on the very edge of the human.

To what extent is the body, as matter, involved with death, even dead already? Coole and Frost contrast the work of new materialism with Cartesian descriptions of the material body: "we discern as an overriding characteristic of the new materialists their insistence on describing active processes of materialization of which embodied humans are an integral part, rather than the monotonous repetitions of *dead matter* from which human subjects are apart" (8, emphasis mine). In Chapter Two, I discussed the relationship between copying, and materiality, citing Marcus Boon's *In Praise of Copying*, an excerpt of which I'll share again here:

> Arguably, the first 'copies' that human beings encountered in the current pejorative sense of the word were the dead bodies of members of their community. These dead bodies were 'undifferentiated,' in the sense that Girard uses the word—emptied of the life and agency that gave them a particular form, returning back to nature and formlessness […] Reduced to skeletons, most human beings look the same; reduced to matter, the human body is absorbed back into the earth. (99)

Boon's description of death as a reduction to matter assumes that what keeps the body from being already so reduced is the presence of an opposing binary force in the form of mind, spirit, animation, or personality. Descartes's meditation on the bodies that walk past his window carries a similar implication, one against which new materialist critics argue when positing matter as vibrant, rather than dead. After a fashion, David and the Falling man are both, to borrow Boon's words, "emptied of the life and agency that gave them a particular form." David's attempted suicide follows a scene in which he learns that he is but one of many identical robots. His discovery that he is not unique dashes his hopes that, through his uniqueness and the fervency of his love, he might be transformed like Pinnochio into a "real," human boy. His resignation to the material of his own artificial body goes hand in hand with the dehumanization he experiences in this scene, both of which hinge upon what he perceives as the absence of a unique life force. The Falling Man's humanity is also under threat, since the agency that has been taken from him and the helplessness communicated in the photo both serve to dehumanize him, to make him (almost) just another dead body. This also may explain the fervency in the public's need to confirm his identity;[65] much of Junod's article is dedicated to investigating this question and uncovers several likely possibilities, though the final words convey the audience's own helplessness in the face of the body: "we have known who the Falling Man is all along" (2003).

To be seen as only a body, rather than a body animated by agency, consciousness, or mind, is inherently dehumanizing. But does it have to be? Is it possible to register the tragedy of the Falling Man, or even the small but affectively charged image from *A.I.*, in a way that doesn't reiterate a dualism between mind and (mere) body? New materialism suggests that it is not only possible, but crucial, precisely because dehumanization is already such a powerful political

[65] Beyond the simple human need to account, with certainty, for each human loss.

weapon, and because oppression and a perceived reduction to the material often go hand in hand. Chen makes a similar observation in *Animacies: biopolitics, racial mattering, and queer affect*. When analyzing dehumanization and objectification she argues that "[t]he two are not synonyms, but they do exist within overlapping spheres of meaning; and, I argue, they come to mean in a similar way under the brutal hierarchies of sentience in which only some privileged humans are granted the status of thinking subject" (42-43). This chapter looks at a Shelley Jackson's short story collection, *The Melancholy of Anatomy*, in which the body is separated from the recognizably human. I argue that this bodily defamiliarization offers an opportunity to reimagine the relationship between the body and the human, outside the framework of dualism.

One of the main problems with the body is how gross it is. When a body is perceived as matter, as merely bodily matter, it repulses us. It acts as a threat against our own humanity, because it reminds us of what we are reduced to if the too fragile autonomy of the mind should fail to animate us. Writing about the excreted products of the body, Kristeva explains, "There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit—*cadere*, cadaver" (1982 3). In her description of abjection, Kristeva explains that the repulsion we may feel when confronted with the products of the body has, at its root, our terrified need to separate ourselves from the pure materiality of the body. To do so is to preserve our sense of our own life, because this material itself signals death. The body is gross because, as much as we depend upon it, its material exists in excess of the site where we perceive ourselves to be: the sentience where our life is seated.

The body is gross, it is in excess. Definitions of "gross" encompass not simply the materially off-putting, but excess in particular (www.oed.com).[66] Jackson's *Melancholy of Anatomy* revels in the material excess of the body, in all its grossness. The collection is comprised of stories in which individual characters confront bodily organs and other corporeal materials that are physically separated from their conventional anatomical position in the human body and have grotesquely expanded far beyond their normal physical size. The organization of the stories in *The Melancholy of Anatomy* is structured loosely around the four humors, the bodily categories by which pre-modern medicine posited organized both the health of the body and the temperament of the person to whom that body belonged. The stories are grouped into four sections, each of which is named after one of the four temperaments, which appear in the order of "Choleric," "Melancholic," "Phlegmatic," and "Sanguine," each comprised of three stories apiece.[67]

Jackson's reference to the bodily (physical) humors is paired with a strange and sly bodily (comic) humor. In one of the more straightforwardly comical stories, near the end of the collection, the grossness[68] that has been present in each of the stories becomes a more direct part of the narrative content. In the storyworld of "Blood," the entire landscape menstruates once a month, blood oozing from deep in the ground, threatening to push its way to the surface and cover the land. The story follows a series of attempts to contain and conceal the landscape's troubling and unsightly bodily functions: city managers create a network of pipes below London in order to redirect the blood and keep it from seeping above ground (as it is allowed to do in the

[66] I find it amusing, though too tenuous to include in this analysis, that one usage of "gross" operates specifically in reference to print ("gross print").
[67] There is one story, "Heart" which stands alone at the front of the collection, not belonging to any of the four subsequent humoral sections.
[68] Though, as some of the later examples will show, this grossness often works alongside beauty and even reverence.

country). The central character is a member of a cleanup crew—the swabbers—that goes into these pipes every night with giant tampons to soak up the menstrual fluid. These swabbers themselves are taboo, and often delight in the discomfort that their sight and smell cause to the few unfortunate townsfolk who encounter them in the daylight hours (in order to avoid troubling the townsfolk, their cleaning of the blood pipes takes place at night). They revel in their own abjection, embracing the blood that so disconcerts everyone else, finding power in their ability to tolerate its grossness.

These two responses to the blood, repulsion on the one hand and crude joy on the other, are heavily gendered. The city officials who try to manage and conceal the blood are men, and the swabbers are nearly all women, who are, as the narrator states, "less inclined to get funny about the blood" (2002 142). Jackson's choice to emphasize a material found only in anatomically female bodies, along with her gendering of the responses to the blood, plays off the conventional gendering of the mind/body divide itself. As discussed in earlier chapters, one of the qualities of dualism that has come under feminist critique is its tendency to figure women as inherently more corporeal and men as inherently more cerebral. This happens specifically through an economy of representation that places women as the "guardians" (as Grosz puts it) of a body that offers a culturally invisible support that frees men to pursue abstract thought without being tainted by materiality (1995 122). Precisely this dynamic is at work at the beginning of "Blood": the men running the city wish to go about the business of governance without any reminder of the material upon which their culture is literally built, and the women cleaning the blood are required to remain invisible—logistically, by working at night, and socially, through stigmatization and exclusion. However, the body is impossible to entirely repress. A small amount of blood leaks into the water supply and stains the white glove of the especially

squeamish male mayor, leading him to redouble (feebly, it turns out) his efforts to make the blood disappear, along with the women who are equated with it. He replaces the swabbers with machines, so that both the blood itself and the humans connected to it are cast out, unnecessary. The dehumanization of the blood workers is complete: the body, the blood, and the women are conflated and dismissed, leaving behind the linked forces of the mind, the city culture, and the men who run it.

Emerging from this fairly conventional women-nature/men-culture binary is a pointed rebellion against the very management of the female body that the story's premise is built on. Even as the swabbers clean out the pipes below the city, they do so with an irreverence toward the masculine structuring of that work. Rather than being content to enter the pipes through "manholes," the workers playfully rename these portals "ladyholes," both because the female workers use them and as a winking reference to the orifices of the female sexual body. Where masculine management tried to control the implicitly female body of the landscape, the workers subtly reinscribe that body in the very language they use as they go about their work. The landscape itself enacts resistance: when arrogant businessman Mr. Strick builds an enormous skyscraper whose foundation disturbs the barrier keeping blood out of the city, the building's first two floors begin to slowly fill with blood. The reassertion of the blood is greeted by the former swabbers as a natural protest against the phallocentric project of building a tower to dwarf Big Ben, "Strick had himself a towering monument to something even bigger than his opinion of himself: the fat old unstoppable earth" (2002 180). Like the "ladyholes," this masculinist architectural project is rewritten in acknowledgement of the female body. The town is forced to call upon the swabbers yet again, but this time in broad daylight, to clean the menstruation that is no longer subsurface but emerges (beautifully, the workers find) into public

view. From within the binary that links women to nature and the body and men to culture and the mind, this story imagines a reassertion of the body that shifts it out of its position as the subordinate term (bringing with it, by implication, its sister concepts of femininity and nature). So prominent is that body that it invades the other halves of this binary, rising above the ground, staining the phallogocentric tower, what Grosz might call, "the torsion of the one into the other, the passage, the vector, or uncontrollable drift of the inside into the outside and the outside into the inside" (1994 xii).

Running parallel with this masculinist management of the female body is a story structure that presents narrative as its own form of management. The story, told in the voice of one female swabber, is framed by a male interviewer who has recorded her story for a book project, and his comments on the circumstances of the story's telling periodically interrupt her descriptions of the events. Despite these interjections, her voice dominates the story, resisting any editorializing her interviewer might attempt to make on her telling. During his first interjection, he pauses to add a bit of journalistic flourish, using a level of descriptive ornamentation and sentimentality in stark contrast to the her own devil-may-care style:

> *She has stopped her account and now stares for long moments into the yeasty depths of her pint glass. Who knows what she sees there? I have no doubt that her life has been hard, but only at such moments does her manner reveal any discontent. It is quickly shaken off, however, and her narrative is picked up again.* (2002 138)

Compared with her voice, which dominates the story, the interviewer's attempts at verbal control appear feeble at best. His repeated use of unnecessary passive tense doesn't make his voice seem more authoritative, but rather ultimately weakens it. Especially notable is the way that the swabber's verbal debauchery stains his language, just as the blood stained the mayor's glove; the

flowery language of the "yeasty depths" of her glass do less to convey the interviewer's impression of the scene than they crudely remind the reader of the vaginal tunnels in which the swabber works.

The swabber's voice cannot be constrained by the management of narrative any more than the blood can be completely repressed and erased. The first time that she acknowledges her interlocutor within her own descriptions, pausing to speak to him directly, is also the first time she uses the word "tampon" in her descriptions of her work. The surprising frankness of both her address to the interviewer and her reference to the tools of her trade shift her position in relation to both body and story. In each, she continues the work assigned to her—cleaning up blood and giving her story—but does so with an acknowledgement of the apparatus of each task, providing a counterpressure to the masculinist project that would erase blood, erase her labor, erase her role in co-creating this narrative. She makes an ally of her interviewer—it is he who will eventually recommend her services to the city when the tower fills with blood. The story ends with an assertion of her physical and narrative control; she ends by telling of the beginning of a new sexual relationship (her first since her last partner, a swabber, died) and refusing to describe that relationship past its inception. She wishes her interviewer well, but makes it clear that her body and its relationships are more important to her than his developing book, trading her former invisibility for simple privacy.

The relationship between the managed body and the managed story calls attention to the ways in which the body—like the swabbers of the story—is called upon to perform representational labor. At times, the textual presentation of that labor reinforces matter's role as subordinate to the mind, as seen in the relationship between Molly's body and Case's hacking in *Neuromancer*. More often, though, that labor is deployed in ways that speak back to the real

world abuses of bodies like those being depicted in the text, as seen in *Beloved* and *Empire of the Senseless*. In all of these, female bodies (in various forms, experiences, and manifestations) in particular that are used. Irigaray describes the role of women in metaphor as part of masculine economies of representation in her extended critique of Plato's cave:

> An ideal of truth is in fact necessary to under-lie and legitimize the metaphors, the figures used to represent the role of women, without voice, without presence. The feminine, the maternal are instantly frozen by the 'like,' the 'as if' of that masculine representation dominated by truth, light, resemblance, identity. By some dream of symmetry that itself is never ever unveiled. The maternal, the feminine serve (only) to keep up the reproduction-production of doubles, copies, fakes, while any hint of their material elements, is turned into scenery to make the show more realistic. The womb, unformed, 'amorphous' origin of all morphology, is transmuted by/for analogy into a circus and a projection screen, a theater of/for fantasies. (*Speculum* 265)

Irigaray describes the feminine, and the female body, being absorbed into the machinery of metaphor, called upon to perform the work by which the "show [is made] more realistic" while having their literal materiality erased as part of that service. This Jackson story draws upon that same expectation of representational labor on the part of the female body, and the presumed invisibility that overtakes that body in the course of its performing said labor. Yet the story offers a curious way out of this, not by having the swabbers renounce their work, but by showing them renewing that work in plain view of the townspeople. Rather than rejoining their human community by leaving the body behind, and so reversing their dehumanization, they proudly declare their ties to that body, in all its glorious grossness, and bring it with them out of the shadows.

This is a tactic that I see throughout *The Melancholy of Anatomy*, though it manifests differently across the collection's thirteen stories. The matter of the body is dislocated from its

anatomical location and starts, in varied ways, to create its own path toward agency and vibrancy, apart from the animating consciousness of the subject to which it might once have belonged. From this material issues a new, non-dualist subject, calling into question the privileged status of sentience, and the current valuations of life as a category of being. Jane Bennett writes:

> [T]he case for matter as active needs also to readjust the status of human actants […] At one level this claim is uncontroversial: it is easy to acknowledge that humans are composed of various material parts […] But it is more challenging to conceive of these materials as lively and self-organizing, rather than as passive or mechanical means under the direction of something nonmaterial, that is, an active soul or mind. (10)

The next section offers some examples of bodily materials that begin to demonstrate their status as "lively and self-organizing," capable of resisting the dehumanization that "mere" matter is so often pressed into. While not each of these examples demonstrates success, they do present the beginnings of possible alternate routes to the human, detouring the organizing force of a Cartesian mind.

Rehumanization

"Phlegm" takes place in a storyworld in which most forms of social greeting involve producing phlegm for others to fondle, to intermingle with their own phlegm. In one respect, this is a humorous (pardon the pun) extension of the somewhat more acceptable behavior of making a promise by lightly spitting into one's palm before shaking hands, but as the story progresses it is clear that the entire storyworld treats phlegm as a semi-sacred expression of community and

emotional availability. The protagonist begins to rebel against this, withholding her phlegm from others, even when confronted with the kinds of situation that normally stimulate it. Even more comical than the story itself is a series of appendices, taken from self-help literature designed to improve the reader's relationship with phlegm. These passages parody a Cartesian reading of the mind as master of bodily material by presenting the lofty activity of abstract self-examination through the medium of mucus. They explicitly draw upon the discourse of psychoanalysis:

> Its scattered bits and pieces knit together into a degraded form of imago, or 'booger.' By applying a little focused nostalgia to kinks and pressure points on the canals, you can release the opinion and set the engine back in motion. Put your whole family behind your movements. Allow your father to rock gently: pushing, pulling. Your mother should be close to, but not touching, the surface; this is called feathering. The imago is never an undifferentiated lump, but is criss-crossed with nostalgic forces. Only you can bring these in harmony. (2002 119)

The mind's exploration of its own psychological past here would constitute a fairly conventional, if jargon-laden, portrait of the psychological interior that is supposedly untouched by the body. In earlier chapters, I looked at moments in which texts used the language of bodily materiality to describe the workings of such interiors. Here, however, the material of mucus has so wholly taken over the space of the mind that the passage mostly serves as a critique latter's attempted mastery—either of itself, or of bodily material. The mind is simply unable to separate from the body; it is imbricated in the material, and only through that material can self-appraisal—and conscious personhood more generally—be performed.

Elsewhere in the appendices of "Phlegm," a very different kind of personhood emerges from the material of mucus, this time separated from the work of the kind of psychoanalytic mind described above. Here, entirely new "people" are fashioned out of the boogers, or at least

reports of them doing so has become part of folk mythology: “Wizards who create servants or concubines out of their own phlegm are sure to be driven to madness and death by their creations; fairies who steal mortal children often replace them with an identical creature made all of phlegm; a dead woman’s face will appear in her murderer’s phlegm during congress with his new lover” (2002 122). In these three examples, the bodily material that has already been dislocated from its conventional anatomical place transforms into a new “person,” physically separate from the original human body from which that material issued. These new phlegm people are not under the control of that original body, nor the consciousness animating it. Even the wizard who, in a dramatic example of the exploitation of the body by the mind, explicitly fashions his own phlegm into concubines soon finds himself losing control of his creations and driven to “madness and death.” Notably, matter itself is not consigned to death (as it is in conventional descriptions of matter as passive and lifeless), but instead the attempted mastering consciousness. The murderer’s phlegm continues this trend, resisting death by partially reanimating a different, exploited body. Bodily materials begin to take on lives of their own, requiring a reexamination of sentience as the ultimate guarantor of liveliness.

These strange, materially animated “people” appear elsewhere in *The Melancholy of Anatomy*, sometimes taking on more explicitly the qualities of subjectivity. In “Nerve,” the central character, George, encounters a group of loose nerve fibers that have woven together into an entity with some subject-like properties. This is, in the world of the story, a common occurrence; nerves harvested from nerve fields find themselves weaving together in forgotten corners of the floors of the factories where that nerve is processed. We learn that it has become a habit for children to bend and tie the fibers into crude dolls, even making them aprons or little bow ties. George is horrified by the practice, stating, “The poor things were in agony. They were

just alive enough to feel pain. A knot of appetite and no insulation. An erect twinge, a stich on tiptoe" (2002 73). Shortly after this statement, George examines his own body: "Sitting on the toilet, he squeezed the rolls of fat around his middle, cupped his breasts, measuring. Somewhere inside George was another George: spiderlike, avid, flexile. Like grammar, but physical. George wanted to make himself into this other George so that he would be more like his lover and by being like him, possess him again" (2002 73-74). The process by which the nerve is fashioned into a "person" is followed quickly by this description of George's desire to fashion himself into "this other George." Not only has the nerve wound together to form a new subject, but it is on this subject that George wishes to model his own body; it is this kind of subject George imagines to be "inside" him, rather than an animating consciousness that would separate him from this purely material body.

The creation of new subjects out of body material has its fullest expression in "Sleep." The inclusion of sleep as one of the bodily materials upon which Jackson's collection meditates is itself already a gesture that begins to reevaluate the status of material in relation to the body. While sleep is inherently bodily, it is not a material substance in a conventional sense, and its inclusion suggests a revaluation of nonmaterial entities (including consciousness itself) as having material properties. Coole and Frost suggest a similar approach to the relationship between the material and the supposedly immaterial, proposing a ""monolithic but multiply tiered ontology [in which] there is no definitive break between sentient and nonsentient entities or between material and spiritual phenomena" (10). However, while they gesture to the possibility of a material description of subjectivity, they stop short of elaborating what that might look like, offering only the suggestion of subjects "being constituted as open series of capacities or potencies that emerge hazardously and ambiguously within a multitude of organic and social

processes" (10). Rather than locating the subject in an animating consciousness, Coole and Frost describe a less locally situated subject, one whose liveliness manifests out of a collection of disparate elements. In the storyworld of "Sleep," such a collection is imagined in explicitly material terms; sleep falls from the sky like snow, and people collect the sleep together, forming it into bodies (like making snowmen).

These bodies/subjects are called substitutes, and they act as replacements for the people who make them, capable of leading out their creators' daily lives in their stead. Freeing the "original" to venture forth into a new, happier life (called "dreaming"), the substitute remains to complete the cumbersome tasks the original can no longer bear to manage: "Your substitute can vote for you, take a test or a beating, deliver a public speech, perform the marital duties, or commit suicide for you" (2002 130). On the one hand, this reinforces the dualist construction of the body's material status being a precondition of the mind's ability to be free; in this case, the "original" is freed from the physical tasks of life and is able to detach and enter the ambiguously described, but presumably abstract, activity of "dreaming." Yet, that from which the original is freed appears to be life itself. The substitute's ability to even commit suicide for the original, while it may on the one hand link the substitute's purely material body to death, also suggests that the substitute and original share a stake in the process of animation. This is not to suggest that the substitute fully takes on its own animation separate from the original—indeed, upon the original's death, the substitute falls apart, back into the physical matter of sleep. But the original and substitute's relationship nevertheless cannot be accommodated by a dualist model of the relationship between life, material, and consciousness. This also bears comparison to "Foetus," in which the more explicitly human entity of the foetus is similarly able to be formed into new material objects. Interestingly, despite the fact that the described foetus does appear to have an animating

consciousness of its own, the items it replicates are decidedly non-sentient, which again blurs the line between materiality and consciousness. Jackson writes "The foetus is made of something like our flesh, but not the same, it is a sort of *über* flesh, rife with potentialities […]The foetus learns from what it neighbors, and may become what it too closely neighbors. Then your foetus may cease to be; you may find yourself short one member of the household, yet in possession of a superfluous chair, a second stove, a matching dresser" (51).

There remain ways in which substitutes do exhibit fuller differentiation from their originals. For example, they are capable of falling in love entirely without the involvement or direction of the originals. When two substitutes fall in love and have children, the children have a 50% chance of being born originals. Those substitute-born original children are granted a quasi-mystical status: "It will be the living god, and this can be proved by conjuring it to make a substitute for itself. The sleep will fall apart in the child's hands: the real original can have no substitutes." (2002 132) The substitute, fashioned out of bodily material, not only takes on its own subject-like qualities, but is capable of producing a subject whose life and animation is entirely autonomous from the governing consciousness that shaped his or her parents. Through the body substance of sleep, we arrive at a new kind of subject whose humanity is differently constituted. This substitute-born original exhibits marked differences from conventional subjects, including, but not limited to, their inability to manipulate and exploit the "matter" of sleep into its own substitute. This kind of subject is a "real original," is somehow more human than the humans from which his or her parents came. Jackson imagines a path to humanization that does not depend upon a separation from the material of the body, but instead emerges directly from that material. In the next section, I'll continue to examine the relationship between matter and animation, which, in Jackson's collection, is intertwined with the materiality of text itself.

Accumulation, Emplacement, Narrative: The Matter with Life

"Fat," the final story of the collection, presents a bodily materiality that has spun somewhat out of control. Like "Blood," it depicts body materials that have wholly taken over the story's setting—in this case, a house. The unnamed protagonist addresses the story to her ex-husband, revealing to him the ways in which she has let herself go since he left, that she has allowed fat to accumulate. However, in this story, fat does not accumulate within the bodies of the characters themselves (at least, not directly). Here, fat is a household nuisance that accumulates on all surfaces, be they architectural or bodily, and without regular scraping off the fat butters, and eventually takes over, the entire home space. The speaker revels in the discomfort this might be causing to her ex, a slender man whom the speaker describes as repulsed by her own bodily shape and her relaxed attitude toward the fat. Like "Blood," the grossness of the body is a source of enjoyment, even pleasure, for the central character.

Though fat is not as directly linked to the female sexual body as the titular materials of stories like "Blood," "Milk," and "Egg" are, there is nonetheless a distinctly sexual dimension to the presentation of fat in the story. The ex-husband's prudishness on the subject of fat resembles sexual puritanism, a fact that the protagonist appears to enjoy taunting him with. The dressing gown she wears as she navigates her way through the fat on her lawn offends him, she says, because of the roses on it, whose own size (i.e. fatness) is "shameless as a beaver shot" (2002 171). Part of the protagonist's confusion on the occasion of their breakup is the way that a sexually charged relationship to fat used to excite her husband; he would find articles on fat and "we read them to each other like pornography" (2002 167). Eating, reading, and fat once worked together in their sexual play: "You loved that bit. "It's our food!" you crooned, stuffing a gooey

finger in my mouth. You were holding the page open with your elbow. "'We live on it'—now swallow, there's a good girl—'but we don't discuss it" (2002 168). It was through such a document that he proposed marriage:

> You were the one who wanted a traditional wedding. I still have the article you handed me by way of asking. 'Like Carnival, the cataclysm of marriage occasions a temporary inversion of values; the private is publicized, the unspoken spoken, the degraded is raised up. The bride and groom are left alone to fast. They allow fat to form on their naked bodies; this is augmented on the eve of the wedding by the bridesmaids and best man, who dab on pats of it until the couple is encased in towering masses, hers a sphere, his a cone. [At the wedding, in] the center of each mass hangs the naked body like a larva.' While I read, you blushed and fiddled with the ring. (2002 168)

Within the wedding ceremony, the specific sculpting of the bride's fat into a sphere (calling to mind stereotypically female bodily curves, or the egg itself) and the groom's fat into a cone (i.e. a phallus), the accumulation of this bodily material is repurposed as an expression of heterosexual lovemaking, a fact emphasized later by the assertion that "Our modern kiss was once the first bite of spousal fat" (2002 169).

In the wedding ceremony, the dislocated bodily material of fat is redeposited onto human bodies, not to be integrated with those bodies in fat's conventional anatomical place, but to fashion this material into a new shape. The shapes formed are non-human, yet still retain expressions of human sexuality, even if they don't literally reproduce the anatomy with which lovemaking might happen. These new shapes, like the bodies of substitutes in "Sleep" and George's lover in "Nerve," suggest a path to the human through bodily material rather than an abstract animating consciousness. While this fat is still molded and manipulated by humans, the placement of humans at the shapes' center, as part of that material, continues to blur

conventional roles of body and subject. The suspension of a human body in shaped fat occurs again later in the story. The protagonist confesses that her loneliness has caused her to create a new lover out of balls of fat, stacked on top of each other like a snowman. She describes this lover, whom she has named Fatty the Fatman: "He's not much like you—so rounded, so very relaxed. I could sink into him. In fact, I have—I tried to sit on his lap yesterday. I found myself inside him!" (2002 170). The speaker's sexual, if accidental, penetration of Fatty the Fatman is presented somewhat differently than the marriage ceremony; the wedding's humor derives from the storyworld's difference from normative wedding rituals (and, through this defamiliarization, a satirization of those norms), whereas the humor of Fatty comes from the protagonist's own loss of propriety and perspective (though the story makes it unclear to what extent her quirks should be read as delusions). Despite these tonal differences, this story presents marriage which begins with a human body suspended in shaped fat, and here shows a version of adultery in which a human body is similarly suspended. In both cases, the human body itself is materially held, and extended, through shaped fat that expresses something human (the abstract shapes associated with the sexual body, the crude representations of snowmen) without being driven by the animating consciousness of the enclosed human body.

Fat, however, is not the only material in this story that accumulates. Running parallel with the layering on of fat that eventually fills the protagonist's entire home are references to the layering of text itself. As discussed above, the backstory of the couple's courtship is presented through quotations from the fat-themed literature they read to one another as part of their sexual play. After the speaker's home has completely filled with fat, an industrious mouse builds a nest for himself lined with "part of the jacket of my collected Kafka" suspended in the fat. This textual accumulation occurs at the level of discourse as well. The speaker admits that her ex-

husband is taking on the qualities of characters in other stories; she calls him "Jack" and "Mr. Sprat," and at one point comments: "You have a cane hooked over your elbow. What a fop you are, Mr. Clean. And what a caricature. Yes, maybe I'm getting muddled, mixing you up with a character in a storybook" (2002 171). Her ex-husband's involvement in the text occurs via a kind of narrative sedimentation, a collection of layers of storytelling that form, like the accumulating fat, the surroundings in which his character is encased, extending him into new shapes, like the fat in which the wedded bodies were suspended.

One effect of this relationship between text and fat is a focus on the material aspects of the story's own language, as well as suggesting a material value for the seemingly nonphysical aspects of text. When she describes her habit of circling the house, "frosted all over with fat, like a despairing cake," the speaker wonders why she is performing this action, and muses that "someone has probably set me at it, hence this feeling of obligation and even, yes, an obscure satisfaction," and suggests that someone may be her ex-husband. After a short interval, she returns to her description of the crawling, yet this time her ex's involvement is no longer framed as hypothetical: "I'm growing uneasy with the idea that you ordered me to crawl around the house like this, 'frosted all over with fat, like a despairing cake.' As if you could come up with something like that! No, I'm probably doing it to spite you" (2002 171). Her notion that she might have a reason for crawling around the yard accumulates new layers, like layers of fat, transforming it from a possible reason to an obligation, from an obligation to a spousal order, from an order to a rebellion. The action itself solidifies, starting as an offhand comparison to a cake and then becoming to a quote of that comparison, which emphasizes that language's status as material that can be moved, shaped, and redeployed. The movement of language from one location to another appears within the story's content as well, when the speaker cuts the signature

from her ex-husband's last letter and pokes it into the head of Fatty the Fatman with a pencil. The signature is enclosed like a floating body in the fat, and when the protagonist later eats the Fatman she inadvertently consumes the signature along with it, taking both the material of text and the material of fat into her own body.

The accumulation of text in this story also emphasizes the position of "Fat" as the final story of Jackson's collection, and, as such, a story that will be read through the cumulative effects of the stories preceding it. The speaker's orbiting of the house echoes the quasi-planetary orbits described in "Heart," the first paragraph of which calls ahead to "Fat" with the sentence: "We can't see them, but we know they're there, fattening" (2002 3). A lengthy description of fat's aesthetic qualities includes references to three other stories in the collection, as the speaker describes "the rattle of phlegm in the throat" (referencing "Phlegm"), "when it has hair and sweepings mixed with it" ("Hair"), and when the fat "has gone a bit curdy" ("Milk"). At this point the speaker pauses to reflect, "But I did not mean to describe it," so that the references to the other stories appear to have accumulated automatically and accidentally, beyond the speaker's own design, like the narrative equivalent of accumulating fat (2002 172). This layering creates ambiguity between the idea of the stories as physical matter and the actual material properties of the ink and page with which they are presented.

The story ends with the protagonist swimming her way out of the fat-filled house, and fashioning bricks out of fat to make an igloo in her yard. She chooses fat that has bodies of small animals suspended in it, eventually enclosing herself and Fatty the Fatman entirely in this new house, one that glows with the spring sun, showing more clearly the shapes of the seemingly dead animals inside. After eating the Fatman in an impromptu marriage ceremony, which ends with the protagonist "married to nobody," she remains in the fat-igloo as the heat of the sun

melts the bricks. As the bricks melt, the animals trapped inside turn out to be alive, and begin to joyfully move their bodies. The speaker herself seems reborn, and offers these final words for the story and the collection: "The sun seemed to shine on us with the specific intention of licking us clean. We moved our limbs in wonder like cripples faith-healed. I lay back in the slick and smiled. There were roses everywhere. There went Musculus. Cadbury was prancing. The first birds tried their wings. I was shining like a gold medal" (2002 179). After having been encased in the bodily material of fat, the original animal and human bodies reemerge, full of life and animation. Implicitly, they are actually more animated than before, as the reference to faith healing suggests a greater amount of physical ability than they had previously held. The reemergence of life from this pure material echoes what has been occurring throughout the collection: the grossness of the body need not be a denial of the human, but can in fact create an alternate route to the human.

This reemergence has textual consequences as well. The layering of language, narrative, and textuality, presented in parallel with the layering of fat, suggests that the melting away of that fat may also occasion a shedding of narrative layers, making a space for a body to emerge from the text as the animals' bodies emerged from the melted fat. Indeed, the fact that the text of the collection ends at this moment supports a reading that the language itself has melted, that the material of text that has housed *us* is disappearing along with the fat that housed the speaker. Have we been floating in bodily material throughout the book? The structure of the collection itself subtly reinforces the idea of the text itself as a body, albeit one subject to organizational torsions that blur the line between interior and exterior.

The collection's four sections offer, through playfully anachronistic reference to the four humors and the four temperaments, a complete portrait of the human body; all four humors are represented, the portrait of the body is complete. Yet we begin outside this body, in a free-standing story called "Heart;" we begin in a narrative space that is positioned simultaneously within and beyond the body. The story itself, of enormous hearts floating freely in outer space, is filled with similar paradoxes of presence and absence, dislocation and connection:

> They give off a kind of light, but it is a backwards light that races inward away from the onlooker to hide itself from view, so this light, whose color we would do much like to know (maybe it's a color we haven't seen before, for which we must sprout new eyes), looks more like darkness than any ordinary darkness, and seems to suck the sight from our eyes, and make itself visible in the form of a blind spot. (2002 3)

This story, by virtue of both its content as well as its position within the collection's structure, presents us with an outside, a space beyond the body that is at the same time *part of the body*, while the light of the heart itself can only be registered through an awareness of its absence. Light, and the body, are both here and not here. We are outside a body that has no exterior. The implied body of the collected stories, as well as the light of the heart itself, are both here by virtue of being not here. Our material relationship with the text moves in and out of enclosure, like the encapsulated and reanimated animals in "Fat."

This play with the structural thematization of bodily exteriors is matched with a paradoxical presentation of interiors. Due to the inclusion of "Heart," the collection has an odd number of stories, and the one that lives at the structural center of the collection, the point at which we are most deeply "inside" the book, is "Dildo." In part, this is a playful structural pun;

"Dildo" lives at the middle of the book, its most interior point, in the same way that dildos are conventionally placed at the middle of the body, through strapping to the pubic bone and/or insertion into the vagina or anus. Beyond the comic implications of this placement is an argument about bodily interiors themselves. At the moment we are placed most deeply inside the body of the text, through an object that is designed for placement inside the literal body, we are also placed in a story named for an object that is not an organic part of the physical body. The structure of this story's use, and the use of this story's namesake, posit an inclusion of the extracorporeal dildo into the body's compass, creating a companion argument to "Heart"'s position outside a body to which it is somehow not exterior.

Both inside and outside the material of body and of book, Jackson asks us to consider our material emplacement as dynamic. In "Milk," a story in which we ourselves are the addressee, we are instructed to relearn the process of making love to the sky so that it will drop milk down to us like rain. These instructions emphasize the body's emplacement in a material environment:

> Go outside. You don't know how to make the sky notice you? Don't worry. The sky already touches you. Your least movement is a caress.
>
> Crook your finger. Feel a slight resistance? Try it again. A coy reluctance, shading almost at once into a gay giving way. Reach forward boldly and squeeze the sky. You will have to get used to the texture of it; the sky is so soft, it accepts everything you do. We're not used to that much freedom. Open your mouth and let the sky slip in, then press it back out. Feel a breeze? Run your fingers through it. Press your thumbs into the sky, then insert your fingers, one at a time, slowly stretching the space you have made. (2002 165)

This description of sky lovemaking emphasizes the fact that, simply by moving through space, the body is already in relation to matter. To embrace a vital materiality is to sensualize

emplacement, to make material (and, I'd argue, subjective) becoming into an active practice of pleasure (perhaps comparable to Grace's sensualized embodiment in *Cleansed*). Our position as readers in the book itself is a material emplacement, one that the collection repeatedly suggests as a potential site for vibrancy, animation, and becoming.

CONCLUSION

Shelley Jackson's review of Jenny Holzer's post 9/11 art piece, in which text from poems about New York crawls in LED light through a building close to ground zero, explicitly questions the role of the reader's body in writing. What begins as an observation about the physically disorienting experience of reading the projected texts grows into a short meditation about the material elements of writing more broadly. Responding to Holzer's description of herself as "a printer of sorts who spends time on technology to integrate text in a surround," Jackson proposes "an expanded definition of literature which includes that 'surround,'" which she describes as follows:

> The material substrate—paper, wall, screen, skin.
> The mark—ink, light.
> The reader's body—turning pages, sitting, walking, standing and watching.
> The setting—bedroom, school street.
> The occasion—time of day, quality of light, sounds, smells, nearby people and adjacent texts.
> The cultural context—literature, memorial, graffiti, public art, fiction, fact; also, the work's representation in advertising, reviews, gossip or scholarship.
> The larger context—the city, the country, the planet, the decade.
> No doubt I could go on to include gravity, time, the first law of thermodynamics, and the speed of light. (cite)

The idea of the "surround" itself blurs the line between the interior of the text and the extra-textual world, suggesting that each bleeds into the other, is partially constitutive of the other. She also implicitly argues for the materiality of the seemingly abstract parts of this expanding textual body, as well as the poetic value of the seemingly extra-textual material of life itself. Literature and life appear here as constituted by a set of textures and experiences that encompass a full

continuum of materiality, rather than a neat division between the abstract (art) and the concrete (life).

The historical surround described in each of my chapters forms an important part of the stakes for embodiment and interiority in each text. *Beloved*'s entanglement with Reagan era rhetoric on black motherhood, itself ensconced in a yet wider surround of obstetrical experimentation on the black female body in and beyond slavery, is not simply background for the text but, as Jackson indicates, actually part of the text itself. So too are *Neuromancer* and *Empire of the Senseless* embedded in the surround of a media landscape in which the female body functions as currency, as setting, as inhabitable architecture—a landscape that itself surrounds 1980s responses to anti-rape activism. *Cleansed* was produced among a surround of third wave revaluations of romance and attachment, themselves carefully navigating the bodily threat of HIV transmission—a threat that too much corporeal proximity could leave the body literally unable to defend itself, unable to maintain a safe border between interior and exterior. *The Melancholy of Anatomy* follows the body out of itself during an era in which the prospect of remaining in a body, subject to that body's materiality and mortality, had to be read against images of bodies falling from towers—escaping the threat of death within the architecture of an assaulted building, only to meet death through the inescapability of the body's own architecture and its inability to withstand such an enormous fall.

Yet Jackson's discussion of the surround is about more than historical context, which can obviously illuminate the themes and stakes of the texts it informs. In the same way that Jackson's short story collection features bodies that move beyond anatomy, blurring the lines between interiority and exteriority, so too does it repeatedly suggest that the boundaries of the textual object itself are similarly traversable. That, in combination with her description of the surround

above, indicates a literary object that not only absorbs the historical, theoretical, and cultural context beyond it, but which actually leaks out to infect and affect the reader and more. Each text under consideration in this dissertation makes such a move: *Beloved* presents itself as a textual body that can enclose life and give birth; *Empire of the Senseless* can penetrate, inhabit, and manipulate other texts; *Cleansed* tests the limits of language's and the body's abilities to hold their contents, presenting moments of rupture in which language attacks, or in which flowers burst from both page and stage. Each text gestures to the possibility that it might reach beyond itself, that the line between the material and the abstract is thin enough that the discursive plane of the text itself contains material elements that are in communication with the extra-textual world, through—and including—the reader themselves. Poststructuralist feminism offers a similar possibility that language itself depends upon a structural foundation that is material, bodily, and sexed, raising the stakes of literary experimentation in this period from mere intellectual exercise to something more akin to worldmaking, a worldmaking that raises the stakes of each text's relationship to its historical moment.

If this dissertation shows anything, it is that even the most seemingly abstract location—the emotional interior of a character, supposedly untouched by the surrounding storyworld much less the extra-textual one—is structured by the material body, is itself quasi-material, and is answerable to the political implications of the kinds of embodiment that are used to represent that interior. The poststructuralist feminist project was and is, in part, a project to make visible the female body upon whose erasure traditional representation was predicated; my project seeks that body our in the very places in which one would intuit it to be most successfully erased. Writing from a moment in which the relationship between second and third wave feminism is still being worked out, in which the very language we use to describe our feminist genealogy is

too often inherited from the conservative backlash against feminism, it is crucial not simply to return to the stakes of the female body, but to make visible the ways that body has been used to make new meanings and imagine new subjects throughout feminism's evolution.

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