Between Fear and Fascination: The Horrific in Women’s Contemporary Video Installation

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I confirm that the word count of this thesis is less than 100,000 words
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Jenny Keane, May 2012
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The female body has historically been determined as the site of the frighteningly monstrous Other in phallocentric thought, and in terms of art practice the traditional female nude was represented as either pure or debased – yet through various modes of expanding and imploding the tropes of traditional horror films, some contemporary women artists have begun to investigate the fragmentation of the female body to evoke a new process of deciphering the dichotomous emotions of fear, disgust and desire.

In a dialogical relationship between practice-based and written research, this thesis explores contemporary video installation case-studies in relation to early feminist art practices, lesbian representation, and psychoanalytical studies. The issues surrounding the classic cinematic representation of femininity cannot be avoided due to the cinematic conventions that have been assimilated into all moving image practice – thus to investigate the challenge of representing femininity, the concept of horror is examined through numerous sources, including film and literary theory, feminism, queer theory, and video art. While the discourse on horror films has been important, especially in relation to feminist theory, its recent connection to video installation has not been fully explored. I question whether video installation engenders a more direct and visceral response to horror due to its spatial and temporal interrelation, and posit that video installations can utilise visualisations of the horrific in an attempt to redefine the rigidity of binaries that are constructed in phallocentric culture.

Through the thesis I propose that my practice, in relation to the work of the other artists examined, explores the liminal state of the body and employs a transgressive mode of spatio-temporality through video and video installation to engender new compelling ways of pushing the boundaries surrounding the fears and fascinations of sexual difference.
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INTRODUCTION

Looking In The Window

We have to describe and to explain a building the upper story of which was erected in the nineteenth century; the ground-floor dates from the sixteenth century, and a careful examination of the masonry discloses the fact that it was reconstructed from a dwelling tower of the eleventh century. In the cellar we discover Roman foundation walls, and under the cellar is a filled-in cave, in the floor of which stone tools are found and remnants of glacial fauna in the layers below. That would be a sort of picture of our mental structure.¹

The most common metaphor for the elucidation of psychoanalysis is the house, and correspondingly, this thesis is structured like a house – an anthropomorphic haunted house. We stare into the window of this vast and frightening myriad of spaces within the formation of what a haunted house ‘is’, rooms that appear and disappear, arbitrary entries and exits, positioning us into and out of shifting spatio-temporal sites. The haunted house becomes a spatial metaphor for both the research and artworks that I create, as well as alluding to the definition of femininity that I wish to invoke – and subvert. This metaphor denotes the shifting ambiguities within the theories, practices and artworks discussed. Psychoanalysis is the major theoretical underpinning, but it is stretched and filtered through film and literary theory, art practices and feminist discourses. Utilising these theories, my main intention is to endeavour to understand horror. I use the term horror, and the horrific, instead of fear or terror because I am interested in its etymology – the word horror almost dichotomously elicits both fear and disgust. In this thesis I examine artworks by women artists that explore the relationship between femininity and horror to examine why femininity and

the female body have been site and sight of horror in history. And what can women artists do to subvert this?

One might ask why have I chosen to employ psychoanalysis to examine the artworks to be discussed? Surely Freud’s supposed overdependence on phallic sexuality would not provide an accurate or relevant exploration of women’s art practices, and indeed, were it to be amassed, the criticism of psychoanalysis would undoubtedly be longer than Freud’s extensive output. And then there is the matter of its harshest critics, feminists. Women were decidedly excluded by Freud’s analyses, albeit they constituted the majority of his case studies, and their emotions and responses were transferred back to the male psyche, to examine how man (as both gendered person and generalisation for humanity) has developed. Yet, there are many women that explore psychoanalytical interpretations in countless fields of theoretical research. Putting the reason for its continual use succinctly, art historian and feminist Griselda Pollock notes:

For feminists, from the earliest publications of psychoanalysis at the beginning of the twentieth century, down to the revival of feminist discourse at its end, psychoanalysis has held open a theoretical space otherwise not offered in other social or cultural theories for examining sexuality, gender and sexual difference.²

Although disputable, the importance of psychoanalytical research is that it opens up questions, becomes a space for exploration, and provides the language for the study of subjectivity and sexuality. And language will prove to be the key in this thesis.

The relationship between psychoanalysis and horror is also very important – in some ways, psychoanalysis is the definitive model to explore horror. As Linda Badley writes:

[Psychoanalysis] explains why vampires, werewolves, and zombies, descended from the fin de siècle Gothic novel and the 1930s movie classics, keep coming back: they are empowered by repression and cultural repetition. It also suggests why now, at the end of the twentieth century, our monsters are so manifestly human.³

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Similarly, Mladen Dolar suggests that Freud’s concept of the uncanny (which I will discuss in Chapter One) defines psychoanalysis; he believes that Freud’s essay *The Uncanny* (1919) provides the clue for the need for psychoanalytic practices. Dolar notes that ‘psychoanalysis is the most fantastic of all fantastic tales – the ultimate horror story.’ He writes:

> Psychoanalysis doesn’t provide a new and better interpretation of the uncanny; it maintains it as a limit to interpretation. Its interpretation tries to circumscribe the point where interpretation fails, where no ‘more faithful’ translation can be made. ... In other words, psychoanalysis differs from other interpretations by its insistence on the formal level of the uncanny rather than on its content.\(^4\)

The link between horror and psychoanalysis can be defined in the very space of the haunted house – the *architectural uncanny* (to use Anthony Vidler’s term) of this spectral space provides us with a physical site for ‘anything that cannot be fully understood or classified.’\(^5\) The haunted house provides a metaphor for the strange power of the mind, but simultaneously for a dichotomous intermingling of time and space, presence and absence, or as Barry Curtis writes: ‘The archetype of the haunted house is a place where the past is still alive and capable of making temporal connections that appear as spatial coordinates.’\(^6\) Curtis notes:

> One of the features of the haunted house is the uncanny animation of the house and its interiors; the flexing of margins and the refusal of objects to stay stored in place or within the limits of their customary significance. The structure itself is prone to metamorphosis and agitation, often in ways that threaten its own integrity as well as the lives of those who explore it.\(^7\) (my emphasis)

While not literally attempting to physically threaten you the reader (!), this thesis explores the metaphor of the house to examine this sense of danger – the movement between temporality and spatiality, the lack of fixed positions, and the exciting frisson between fear and desire that can be seen in recent contemporary video installation art practices.

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\(^6\) *ibid*, p. 40.

\(^7\) *ibid*, p. 11.
Anne Friedberg writes that the (computer, cinematic, television) screen is the substitute for the architectural window: "A portion of this argument is metaphoric: the window has become a metaphor for the screen. But a portion is also literal: the screen has become an actual substitute for the window." Once we stop staring in the window of the haunted house, we enter into the bowels of the building, the frightening cellar. In this space (Chapter One), I discuss the foundations of the three main analyses of horror in the twentieth century – the uncanny, the grotesque and the abject. This chapter explores the theoretical and psychoanalytical methodologies, the working tools, to decipher the emotional state of horror. The theorists discussed adopt a literary approach to analyse the emotion of fear – what is it about language that causes or incites horror? That is a question explored here. This chapter also provides the tools to work with these three major concepts both individually and together – applying either the term ‘uncanny’ or ‘abject’ to an artwork without clarifying if and how these concepts and emotional states differ would be erroneous. Using Alfred Hitchcock’s film Psycho (1960) as a blueprint for the theories, because, as Paul Wells notes, ‘[a]rguably, more than any other genre, [the horror film] has interrogated the deep-seated effects of change and responded to the newly determined grand narratives of social, scientific and philosophical thought,’ I will decipher the uncanny, grotesque, and abject through the film rather than vice versa. This chapter thus defines the three concepts and their histories so that they can be appropriately applied to the artworks discussed in the remainder of this thesis.

The sections between the main chapters in this thesis, called interims (alluding to ‘inter-rooms’ and ‘inter’ rooms), suggest a liminal space, and one where my art practice fits between the theoretical breaks of the research. Rather than solely providing a concluding chapter on my own work, which is the norm in practice-based theses, using a different style of writing I wish to create a fluid movement of my art practice between the theory and the case-studies. Leaving the oppressive cellar, and moving towards the internal workings of the building, I explore the strange space of the toilet in Interim One. Through the metaphor of going ‘down the toilet’ I identify the differences between the irksomely termed and disgusting ‘Abject art’ of the Nineties, and my own

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personal practice. What is it about Abject art that leaves most audiences reeling, and not in a productive way? This interim scrutinizes the work of Cindy Sherman in relation to my video installations *Ingeminated Battology* (2008). I propose that what is wrong with the allusion to abjection in Sherman’s ‘Disgust’ series, alongside many of the artists whose work, whether willingly or not, falls under the heading of Abject art, is that the appropriation of the word ‘abject’ to the imagery is reductive and not theoretically accurate to Kristeva’s concept of abjection. A redefinition of abjection, disgust, and horror in art needs to be analysed. And this, in some ways, is what this thesis sets out to do.

An old joke inspired the next chapter: ‘Why are women’s feet so small? To get closer to the kitchen sink.’ The second chapter takes a slightly different turn, and goes back in time, exploring the work of video artists of the 60s and 70s that began when the practice of video was just establishing itself as an art form. This space is the kitchen – where a woman’s perceived role in the domestic is challenged by early second wave feminist art practices. Their efforts to create video practices in a feminist context, and as a critique of phallic cinematic and televisual experiences, provided a new space to define video art, and feminism itself. This chapter analyses their work in relation to the violence and horror of the female body with reference to film theory – artists such as Suzanne Lacy and VALIE EXPORT utilised the image of the monster, whether through horror film imagery, or monstrous rupturing of the body, to challenge patriarchy in the visual as well as the sexual realm. While the nascent video practices of the 70s were a particularly exciting medium to dissect and evaluate the hold of patriarchy in other art practices and society itself, through their attempt to deny phallocentrism, some of the artists of this time were unintentionally forced to re-establish the phallic binary of masculine-feminine. The problem is that by making feminism other, the work merely validated the patriarchal. As Kathleen Rowe notes: ‘Because as women we cannot simply reject these conventions and invent new “untainted” ones in their place, we must learn the languages we inherit, with their inescapable contradiction, before transforming and redirecting them toward our own

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10 Throughout this thesis, I use the term ‘sexuality’ in its multifarious context: as a drive, as the act, as the allusion to gender, and as a reference to sexual orientation.
The work of these early feminist artists, however, provided a new way of exploring the feminine and heralded the beginnings of a change in perception.

Along The Hall, the second interim, explores my practice in its relationship between the horror film and art. Throughout the previous chapters and interims, I have woven film theory and imagery into the analysis. In Chapter One I look at Hitchcock’s Psycho, while Chapter Two analyses William Friedkin’s The Exorcist (1973). In this interim, I apply the film theory of The Exorcist to a series of my drawings, entitled The Lick Drawings (2009-). The drawings, appropriated from stills of horror films, are explored alongside the analysis of horror films to ascertain how the horror film can be a site for the exploration of the feminine without returning to the binary of male=good/female=evil that horror purports and constantly reiterates. While the horror film provides a fascinating transgressive quality that can somehow be utilised by feminist practices, its formal narrative provides an environment to return to the binary, which positions the female back into the realm of the disgusting and monstrous other. I suggest that the process of drawing, which pauses and subverts the horror film, provides a new way of looking at horror through narrative subversion.

Issues of narrative become a key focus from now on. To link to the spatio-temporal liminality that I attempt to achieve in my practice, this thesis should have been cyclical; it should have had no beginning, middle or end. Yet, the actual definition of a thesis is a narrative, it is the presentation of an argument. As Barthes discusses, writing is presented in two forms, it is ‘the story (the argument), which consists of a logic of actions and a “syntax” of characters, and discourse, comprising tenses, aspects, and modes pertaining to narrative.’ While I obviously cannot create this body of writing without narrative, I explore the issue of narrative, and its relation to video installation practices in the shifting and peculiar attic space (Chapter Three). Apart from some rare exceptions, video installation generally has no decisive linear narrative – through the installation format, the audience can walk in at any stage of the piece, and stay for as long as they wish. How does this disruption of

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11 Kathleen Rowe, The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1995, p. 4.
narrative change the work viewed and what implications does it have for the relationship between horror and the female body? As Chrissie Iles notes:

In the closed space of cinema there is no circulation, no movement, no exchange. In the darkness, spectators sink into their seats as though slipping into bed. The cinema becomes a cocoon, inside which a crowd of relaxed, idle bodies is fixed, hypnotised by simulations of reality projected onto a single screen. This model is broken apart by the folding of the dark space of cinema into the white cube of the gallery.\textsuperscript{13}

Through an analysis of three emerging contemporary video artists, Chloe Piene, Sue de Beer and Mika Rottenberg, I suggest that the lack of formal narrative, in both the installation and the temporal video of these practices, subverts the spectacle of filmic temporality into the liminality between space and time. This in-betweenness shatters the illusion of phallic binaries, which was unfortunately and unintentionally reiterated in some early feminist practices, and provides an alternative environment to dissect and decipher the lost corporeality of the female body.

In an allusion to this strange monstrous female body discussed in the previous chapters, my third interim, The ‘Living’ Room, examines a recent interest in my artistic practice – curation. In a monstrously marked and frightening space called The Station in Belfast, I curated an exhibition entitled Dark Waters (March 2011). Rather than in written form, the individual artworks in Dark Waters themselves, alongside the unorthodox curation of the space, provide a form of research. It is an exploration of the ‘living’ room as a concept – what does living entail? If we were to seek it, the concept of living is ultimately caught up in the process of dying – or to invoke psychoanalysis, it is the \textit{compulsion to repeat}, a vacillation between \textit{Eros} and \textit{Thanatos}. Yet as Linda Badley notes: ‘In \textit{Beyond the Pleasure Principle} Freud himself recognised one area where his psychoanalysis was profoundly lacking: it has offered no psychology of death and dying. He neglected Thanatos, the death drive, much as he neglected the feminine. Implicit in his stance was denial.’\textsuperscript{14} In this interim, through an analysis of the death drive, the monstrous female body, and the archaic mother, I examine the specifics of the building as a singular concatenated installation, exploring how the fourteen artworks by twelve women video artists link in


\textsuperscript{14} Badley, \textit{Film, Horror and the Body Fantastic}, op. cit., p. 21.
varying ways. Analysing Julia Kristeva’s concept of the *chora*, via Kaja Silverman’s critique, I explore an alternative form of curation, one that attempts to create a liminal site of femininity.

Retuning again to the female body, but in a different context, the bedroom is where we go after we leave the frightening ‘living’ room. Rather than avoid or enclose the concept of homosexuality, as it may seem by placing it in a chapter by itself, my interest in lesbian art practices is positioned towards the end of this thesis so as to be able to apply the research already obtained, and simultaneously to create a ghost-like presence throughout the written text, alluding to the concept of the *apparitional lesbian* that I will discuss in this fourth chapter. The bedroom as site for sleep, sex, and relaxation becomes altogether more interesting when the spectral lesbian is ‘envisaged.’ Taken from Terry Castle’s premise that the lesbian body has been *ghosted* in historical and contemporary culture, I identify art practices that use this phantom for subversive purposes. Contrasting with early lesbian art practices that dealt with visibility and exposing the lesbian body, recent contemporary lesbian practices deal with the ghosting effect of lesbian bodies and desires, and the frightening potential of this invisibility. Connecting to the liminal discussion of contemporary video practices in Chapter Three, I suggest that the binary of heterosexual and homosexual is challenged in this somewhat elusive vacillation between presence and absence of the lesbian body in my practice and the work of other lesbian-identified artists, Breda Lynch, Lisa Byrne and Kathy High. Opposing overt representation of sexuality, this chapter suggests that the horror of the lesbian is her invisibility and, simultaneously, her potential presence.

The fourth and final interim queries the fascination with the enclosed environment of the *bathroom*. This interim focuses on a recent exhibition, entitled *Abluō*, in Platform Arts Gallery, Belfast, and examines my use of the bathroom as a site/sight for dealing with and exploring the recurring concepts of monstrosity, sexuality, ghosting, and horror analysed in this thesis. Rather than being an answer to the question of horror in contemporary video art, this exhibition encapsulates my theoretical and practice-based research to date, and presents another set of questions. Returning back in time once more to the chronology and essence of projection, I explore the history of phantasmagoria in relation to the images projected on screen in the installation. Developing
from Kristeva’s theories surrounding the maternal, I examine some of the writings of Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger in relation to the Abluō exhibition, to analyse the ‘in-betweenness’ that has become apparent in the development of my practice-based and theoretical research – the exploration of the liminal art object that ‘invites the viewer to follow it into an unknown, invisible space – yet inside the visible – interlaced by the artist.’

This thesis attempts to explore the history of horror in women’s art practices while simultaneously analysing the issues that are raised when applying this monstrous metaphor to the feminine. Can video installation achieve liminality between the phallocentric binary? In some ways, I believe it can.

Lila reaches the bottom steps [of the cellar], stops, listens, hears the stairboards creaking as footsteps fall hard and measured upon them. She turns, pulls open the cellar door, looks in. The woman is sitting in a comfortable chair, the back of the chair, and the woman, turned to the door. Lila calls a harsh, frightened whisper.

_LILA_

_Mrs. Bates...?_

Lila goes into the room.

Lila goes to the chair, touches it. The touch disturbs the figure. It starts to turn, slowly, stiffly, a clock-wise movement. Lila looks at it in horror. It is the body of a woman long dead. The skin is dry and pulled away from the mouth and the teeth are revealed as in the skeleton's smile. The eyes are gone from their sockets, the bridge of the nose has collapsed, the hair is dry and wild, the cheeks are sunken, the leathery-brown skin is powdered and rouged and flaky. The body is dressed in a high-neck, clean, well-pressed dress, obviously recently laundered and hand-ironed.

The movement of this stuffed, ill-preserved cadaver, turning as if in response to Lila's call and touch, is actually graceful, ballet-like, and the effect is terrible and obscene.

Lila gazes for one flicker of a deathly moment, then begins to scream, a high, piercing, dreadful scream.

And Lila's scream is joined by another scream, a more dreadful, horrifying scream which comes from the door behind her.

_NORMAN'S VOICE_

_off-screen, screaming_

_Ayeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee Am Norma Bates!_

Lila turns.

[Norman's] face is contorted. He wears a wild wig, a mockery of a woman's hair. He is dressed in a high-neck dress which is similar to that worn by the corpse of his mother. His hand is raised high, poised to strike at Lila. There is a long breadknife in it.

Close on [Lila's] face. She is dumb-struck. Her eyes are screaming.

As [Norman] is about to start forward, a man's hand reaches in from the doorway behind, grabs Norman's wrist. Sam comes through the door, still holding tight to the wrist, pulling back the arm and at the same time

A close of [Mrs. Bates’ cadaver’s] face. She appears to be watching and enjoying the fight. Over the shot, the SOUNDS of the struggle, the screams of Norman.  

Psycho

What is in your cellar? Hopefully not a mummified Mrs. Bates! The cellar as a metaphor is the ‘dark entity of the house’ - it is the hidden, frightening, and seldom-seen or used space in the home. It functions as storage, and as the interior of the building’s foundations. But why has it become a fundamental frightening setting for numerous horror films and novels?

In The Poetics of Space, Gaston Bachelard compares the cellar with the attic because they are the top and bottom of the house, or rather they ‘sandwich’ the living area. Bachelard believes:

In the attic, fears are easily ‘rationalized.’ Whereas in the cellar, [...] ‘rationalization’ is less rapid and less clear; it is also never definitive. In the attic the day’s experience can always efface the fears of night. In the cellar, darkness prevails both day and night, and even when we are carrying a lighted candle, we see shadows dancing on the dark walls.

Bachelard sees the attic and the cellar as vertical polarities, the attic and the upper stories of the house are ‘construct[ed] and reconstruct[ed] until they are well constructed’ but the cellar is not in the ‘rational zone’ because the ‘impassioned inhabitant digs and re-digs’. In other words, as Bachelard compares the mind to the house (in keeping with Freudian psychoanalysis), the cellar is the metaphor for the hidden unconscious space of repressed emotions and desires. Bachelard notes that even though we have electrical lighting in the cellar, our unconscious and uncontrollable fears of ghosts and shadows will

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17 Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, op. cit., p. 18.
18 ibid., p. 19.
19 ibid., p. 18.
win, as ‘the unconscious cannot be civilized. It takes a candle when it goes to the cellar.’

Like the unconscious, the cellar is thus the space for the inherent anxieties of the unknown. It recalls a quote by nineteenth century Gothic writer, Anne Radcliffe, who declared that: ‘Terror and Horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them.’ Discussing this quote, the theorist Terry Castle believes that Radcliffe uses this distinction in The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794) to contrast between terror and horror to show that terror is about the anticipation of unknown, its obscurity ‘awakens’ the imagination, while horror horrifies ‘through its lack of mystery. It leaves nothing to the imagination of the viewer.’ Being a follower of Edmund Burke, Radcliffe’s concept of terror is of a sublime terror; a notion of awe and wonder. It is the ‘great,’ the confrontation with extremes that produces pain and terror; this terror causes ‘delightful’ uncertainty and anxiety in the subject. Burke believes that: ‘When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we every day experience.’ Terror thus becomes a ‘tranquil’ and transcendental experience, as ‘delight is the removal of pain or danger’. The sublime is, as Barbara Claire Freeman notes, ‘appropriat[ion] rather than identifi[cation] with that which presents itself as other.’ Horror on the other hand is not about sublime states, it deals with the paralyzing fear of the realization of the unfamiliar, the unknowable – being brushed with death. It is the fear of the dark, the ‘place where you have lost all your bearings, where you were no longer sure of anything. A place where you begin to suspect that there was something present which you couldn’t pin down; something which you wouldn’t be able to identify but which would be dangerous and could destroy you.’ It is where your sense of self is defenceless, ruptured, and powerless – there is no need for imagination, horror is there, present and petrifying. Or as Jack Morgan notes:

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20 ibid., p. 19.
22 Ibid.
24 Ibid., p. 34.
If in comedy the “livingness of the human world is abstracted and presented to us”, in horror the “dieingness,” as it were, of the human world is imaged forth, ritually recapitulated. The comic mask’s antithesis is not only the tragic mask but the repellent mask in moulded rubber sold in K-Mart in November: a face deathly white, shading to green, a face crumpled and hollowed eyed, suggestive of decay and the grave. Underscoring the body’s vulnerability, [horror] heightens our sense of physical peril.

Rather than death itself, it is the realization that death is upon us. Rather than the sublime’s ‘astonishment’, or the ‘expectation’ that terror brings, horror is the visceral and literal act of being frightened. In its manifestation, and allusion to the grave, the cellar epitomizes horror in its most raw form.

While Anne Radcliffe (in my opinion, erroneously) did not believe that horror was as powerful as terror, many other Gothic writers utilized the representations of horror in their writing. It is interesting here to note the tradition of Gothic writing, as Jack Morgan believes that horror and Gothic can be used synonymously, yet it is a difficult concept to define. Recalling Jacques Derrida, can texts ever really belong in one genre? ‘Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging.’

But what makes Gothic even more difficult is its refusal to be ‘genuine’, as Catherine Spooner notes, ‘Gothic … possesses no original. […] Gothic takes the form of a series of revivals, each based on a fantasized idea of the previous one. As a form it has always been about fakery.’

So how do you describe Gothic? Anne Williams writes that her intention in her book, Art of Darkness (1995), was to prove that Gothic was just an ‘expression of […] the ambivalently attractive female, unconscious ‘other’ of eighteenth-century male-centred conscious Reason’, and while she vehemently agrees with this, she notes that ‘the heterogeneous (and always changing) set of Gothic conventions express many dimensions of ‘otherness.’ (The ‘other’ is culture specific, as indeed, the unconscious self may be.)

Catherine Spooner, Anne Williams, Gilda Williams, and other writers believe that Gothic has been coined most succinctly in Chris Baldick’s book The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales (1992). He writes that a Gothic text should entail ‘a fearful

sense of inheritance in time with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space, these two dimensions reinforcing one another to produce an impression of sickening descent into disintegration.\textsuperscript{31}

Subversion of space and time will be discussed further in Chapter Three, but my focus here is defining the ways in which horror is created, defined, and applied. If horror ‘is predominantly concerned with fear of death, the multiple ways in which it can occur, and the untimely nature of its occurrence,’\textsuperscript{32} how then is it manifested? In the twentieth century, and as a divergent response to Burke’s concept of the sublime, there have been three main concepts that have emerged. All stemming from literary analysis and criticism, the grotesque, the uncanny, and the abject have been pivotal to the study of fear in the twentieth and twenty-first century. Through the examination of Hitchcock’s \textit{Psycho}, I will analyze these three concepts in an attempt to define how and why they have been synonymously grouped together to ‘elucidate’ how horror, a) can be explained, b) makes you feel, and c) has its purpose in one’s development and culture. Yet these three concepts, however similar, have different interpretations, and their use in this thesis will be explained in this chapter so as to clarify their usage in my subsequent writing. As Kristeva notes, ‘Any practice of speech, inasmuch as it involves writing, is a language of fear. [...] The writer is a phobic who succeeds in metaphorizing in order to keep from being frightened to death; instead he comes to life again in signs.’\textsuperscript{33}

\textit{Psycho}

In its penultimate scene, cited above, the horror film \textit{Psycho} encapsulates the dreaded horror of the cellar. \textit{Psycho} is regarded as one of Hitchcock’s best films, but also his most gothic and strangest, as Robin wood notes, ‘\textit{Psycho} is undoubtedly the most obscure of Hitchcock’s films. Obscure [also] in a literal sense, because in none of his other films does night seem so black and day so sombre.’\textsuperscript{34} Written by Robert Blotch, it was based on the true story of serial killer Ed Gein. Gein was imprisoned in Wisconsin for the death of (at least) two

\textsuperscript{32} Wells, \textit{The Horror Genre}, op. cit., p. 10.
women, grave robbery, and was also suspected of the (not so) accidental
death of his brother. When the police searched his house, they found the heads
of two missing women, alongside stuffed figurines and furniture made from
human skin. It is claimed that he was a transsexual, who was sewing a ‘woman-
suit’, had masks made from skin and hair, and had collected nine vulvas in a

What is striking about the relationship between \textit{Psycho} and the real
events is the apparent abnormal relationship between Gein and his mother
(Norman Bates and Mrs. Norma Bates in the film). Gein’s mother, Augusta, was
a strict Lutheran; she was severe, harsh, strong. Her belief about sex was that it
was a necessary evil. Hatred for her husband and first-born son, Henry, was
attributed to her dislike of intercourse and her unfulfilled desire for a daughter
was what was believed to have induced Gein’s murderous personality. Harold
Schechter, (unofficial) biographer of Ed Gein, writes that when Edward was
born, Augusta vowed that he ‘would not grow up to be like all the rest of them.
Men. Those lustful, sweating, foul-mouthed creatures who made use of
women’s bodies in such filthy ways. This one […] would be different.’\footnote{Harold Schechter, \textit{Deviant: The Shocking True Story of Ed Gein, The Original ‘Psycho’}, Pocket
Books, New York, 1989, p. 13.} Augusta severely punished Edward, he was meek and subservient, and was not allowed
to talk to anyone but her. Until her death she was totally reliant on him. When
she died, Gein was distraught, and it is believed that this is when the grave
robbing began – ‘He had lost his only friend and one true love. And he was
absolutely alone in the world.’\footnote{ibid., p. 31.}

This overdependence on his mother, which seems to be manifested
through an unrequited desire for her to love him, had caused a rupture in
Gein’s personality. In \textit{Gender Identity Disorder and Psychosexual Problems in
Children and Adolescents}, psychologists Kenneth J. Zucker\footnote{While the negative responses to Zucker’s psychological practices [i.e. ‘reparative’ therapy] are
still up for debate, I feel that elements of research in the book are nonetheless relevant to the
case of Ed Gein.} and Susan J. Bradley believe that this extreme adverse reaction by a mother to her son’s
gender, or her ‘maternal hostility’, is exemplified by trauma which may cause a
tendency towards cross-dressing. They believe this clothing confusion represents ‘the boy confusing “being Mommy” with “having Mommy”’. Gein’s extreme case caused his sense of self to be conflated with another identity, his idealized perception of his mother. Thus, rather than placing Gein into a queer or non-heterosexual position, Gein’s actions can be seen as psychosis.

Yet, this ‘deviant’ attachment between Gein and his mother which is presented in Norman’s relationship to Norma in Psycho, makes references to an incestuous nature and monstrosity by both mother and child and is crystallized in the relationship between sex and death throughout the film – in fact this can be seen in many of Hitchcock’s films, particularly in Marnie which again links to Mrs. Gein’s relationship with Edward. (Bernice Edgar: ‘Too-blonde hair always looks like a woman’s tryin’ to attract the man. Men and a good name don’t go together.’) This connection comes to its extreme in Norman’s murder of Marion Crane, whereby he (as ‘Mother’) kills her because of his desire for her. As Bataille notes, ‘The excess from which reproduction proceeds and the excess which we call death can only be understood with the help of the other. […] The urge towards love, pushed to its limit, is an urge toward death.’ This relation between sex and death will be discussed further in Chapter Two, in relation to abjection, incest, and the maternal female body, particularly in the film The Exorcist.

Psycho’s plot revolves (temporarily) around Marion, a young, ‘beautiful, sexually active woman’, whose theft of $40,000 from her boss and subsequent escape leads her to stay overnight at The Bates Motel en route to her lover’s house. There she meets Norman Bates who sees her to her room and invites her to dinner in the overlooking Gothic-style house that he shares with ‘his mother.’ As she is dressing for dinner, Norman spies on her through a peephole, and then leaves the motel going up to his house. Marion hears ‘mother’ and son fighting over the possibility of her attending dinner in ‘their’ house - ‘I won’t have you bringing strange young girls in for supper. By candlelight, I suppose, in the cheap erotic fashion of young men with cheap, erotic minds!’ Norman ignores his mother’s protests, but nevertheless feeds Marion in his office. After

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40 Marnie, Alfred Hitchcock, 1964, transcript.
43 Sefano, ‘Psycho,’ op. cit.
dinner, Marion retires to her room and decides to return the money in the morning and suffer the consequences of her actions. Before going to bed, she decides to take a shower. While showering, a nightdress-wearing figure comes into the bathroom, stabs her and leaves her dead on the bathroom floor. Norman finds the girl in the morning, certain that ‘Mother’ has killed her.

The plot changes. As the main character is dead, the story continues with Marion’s lover Sam and her sister Lila searching for her, alongside a private investigator, Milton Arbogast. Arbogast traces Marion’s last whereabouts to the Bates Motel and goes there alone to investigate. He is subsequently killed by the nightdressed figure. Having not heard from Arbogast, Sam and Lila try to search for Marion themselves, also leading them to the Motel. Here they discover the truth. Norman, who has preserved his mother’s body and placed her in the cellar, has been dressing in her clothes and carrying out the killings himself – he has developed a split-personality, a division between himself and his projection of his mother. Lila and Sam escape, and call the police. Norman is institutionalized.

Looking at Psycho as a narrative, the film itself is focused on a cross-over between a linear narrative and a non-linear one. (I will discuss the interesting and transgressive nature of narrative subversion further in Chapter Three.) The first story is the personal narrative of Marion Crane. It is her story, her robbery, her desire for her lover and hope for their ultimate escape from the small town and ultimately her marriage. This is where the narrative is supposed to stop. The Victorian novel narrative structure of ‘marriage-or-death,’ however, comes into effect and marriage is effaced; death is the result. Yet as Laura Mulvey notes:

Desire for marriage, and for the happy ending, are not simply dispersed through a naturalistic device [in Psycho] but violently truncated and superimposed. The interchangeability of death and marriage, functioning as figures of ending, is dramatized, ironically and tragically.45

Through narrative movement, which is a metaphor for and activated by Marion’s desire (and also associated with the death-drive), Mulvey believes

that her subversion in terms of gender principles and also the actual law, the film implies that both Norman and Marion become transgressive narrative compliments to each other. Here the narratives converge.

Norman is the definitive protagonist, and his personal narrative pivots around the linear personal narrative of Marion as well as the non-linear detective narrative of Sam, Lila and Arbogast. The detective story is a backwards narrative, which as Peter Wollen notes is the ‘narrative of one story [which] conclude with the narration of another,’46 and it changes the trajectory of the entire film, turning Psycho into a ‘hybrid, uncanny tale.’47

This ‘uncanny’ narrative is accentuated in the film’s imagery. They are present in the Bates’ dark and gloomy house, dead birds, and other symbols that make up Gothic metaphors, and simultaneously Anne Williams notes that: ‘Literally and metaphorically, Gothic plots are family plots; Gothic romance is family romance,’48 thus even the storyline itself evokes the Gothic. So why did Hitchcock use the Gothic? As Laura Mulvey writes, Gothic imagery is the visualization of the uncanny. It is the ‘style, vocabulary and topography for [the] sense of nameless dread’49 that was not concatenated into a psychoanalytical concept until Freud released his essay The Uncanny in 1919. The Gothic therefore is the word for the particular imagery, while the uncanny is the emotion that is felt.

**The Uncanny**

In his essay, through an etymological analysis of the word ‘unheimlich’ ['unhomely’ in German], an analysis of E. Jentsch’s interpretation of the uncanny in On the Psychology of the Uncanny from 1908, and a literary study of stories such as E.T.A. Hoffman’s The Sand-Man (1816), Freud describes the uncanny as ‘that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar.’50 Freud’s study of the etymology of ‘unheimlich’ is an interesting one. Freud goes to enormous trouble to find references for both ‘heimlich’ (homely) and ‘unheimlich’. What he discovers is

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46 Peter Wollen, cited in Mulvey, Death 24x a Second, op. cit., p. 90.
47 Ibid.
49 Mulvey, Death 24x a Second, op. cit., p. 96.
that the word ‘heimlich’ has two distinct meanings; the first passages include the positive (homely) meaning:

Auf einem hohen heimlichen Schattenpfade ... längs dem rieselnden rauschenden und plätschernden Waldbach, “on a high, peaceful, shady path ... besides the purling, murmuring, babbling woodland brook”.

As the descriptions progress, the second meaning of the word develops. ‘Heimlich’ becomes more mysterious, secretive, dark, and hidden - the familiar, safe, and private becomes ‘increasingly ambivalent, until it finally merges with its antonym unheimlich’:

Mit heimlicher Schadenfreude zusehen, “to watch with hidden glee”; Heimlich seufzen, weinen, “to sigh, to weep, secretly, as if someone had something to hide.”

Thus, through this etymological approach, and similar to the Kristevian abject (which I will discuss further on in this chapter), Freud invokes language as key to understanding the uncanny.

What is interesting to note (and I will expand upon later in Chapter Two) is that something that relates to the homely, the domestic sphere, should suddenly become hidden, mysterious, and strangely dark. What is it about the domestic space that becomes ‘the locality for the worst of horror’? Is it the domestic feminine space that becomes an abyss of blackness, and again returns the female, and her cavernous ‘lack’ into a hidden and inexplicable monstrousness? As we read on, it becomes clear and certain.

Further along in the essay, Freud quotes Schelling who says: ‘Uncanny is what one calls everything that was meant to remain secret and hidden and has come into the open.’ This quality of the hidden returning is termed by Freud as ‘the return of the repressed.’ This return is one of the two main forms in Freud’s uncanny, and it denotes the return of infantile repression which causes one form of uncanny experience. Through The Sand-Man Freud explores infantile repression in the uncanny nature of both the automaton and a loss of one’s eyes, but he rejects Jentsch’s (supposed) opinion that Olimpia (the automaton) denotes a fear or ‘intellectual uncertainty’ regarding inanimate objects being

51 ibid., p. 127.
52 ibid., p. 134.
53 ibid., p. 130.
54 Wells, The Horror Genre, op. cit., p. 18.
55 Freud, The Uncanny, op. cit., p. 132.
anthropomorphised or coming to life. Rather, Freud believes that, within the story, the real uncanny event deals with the character of the Sand-Man himself. This elusive eponymous protagonist is:

...a bad man who comes to children when they won’t go to bed and throws a handful of sand in their eyes, so that their eyes jump out of their heads, all bleeding. He then throws their eyes in his bag and takes them off to the half-moon as food for his children.\(^{56}\)

Through a Freudian analysis of the story, this character comes to represent the castrating father, the rival for the child, within the protagonist Nathaniel’s Oedipal love for his mother. Freud comes to this conclusion by correlating fear of losing one’s eyes with the fear of castration. Freud writes that the castration complex is a phantasy\(^ {57}\) in which a child is puzzled by the anatomical difference between the sexes and subsequently believes that the female’s penis has been removed. The boy child thus believes, through the Oedipus complex (in which the child wishes to possess the mother and to eliminate the father), there is a possibility of his penis being cut off by the father.\(^ {58}\) I would like to note here that the psychoanalytical concept of fetishism consequently comes about from the disavowal of the woman’s (or mother’s) lack of penis, and an object becomes the substitute for the missing appendage.\(^ {59}\) This substitution acts as a mask, disavowing the ‘traumatic sight [or site] of absence’, and the ‘psyche constructs a phantasmatic topography, a surface, or carapace, which hides ugliness and anxiety with beauty and desire.’\(^ {60}\) While the fetish object substitutes the repression, it does not entirely replace the fear and the uncanny ‘return of the repressed’ can still occur. I shall speak about the Freudian model of fetishism again in Chapters Three and Four, but what is relevant here is that Freud believes castration, the fetish object, and other infantile repressions are very much embroiled in the feeling of the uncanny. In The Uncanny essay, he presents a warning to unbelievers:

\(^{56}\) Ibid., p. 136.
\(^{57}\) I use the term phantasy, in the Freudian sense, to show the ‘subject as represented as a protagonist engaged in the activity of wish fulfilment’. Barbara Creed, The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis, Routledge, New York, 1993, p. 6.
I would not advise any opponent of the psychoanalytic view to appeal to Hoffman’s story of the Sand-Man in support of the contention that fear for the eyes is something independent of the castration complex. For why is the fear for the eyes so closely linked here with the death of the father? Why does the Sand-Man always appear as a disrupter of love? [...] These and many other features of the tale appear arbitrary and meaningless if one rejects the relation between fear for the eyes and fear of castration, but they become meaningful as soon as the Sand-Man is replaced by the dreaded father, at whose hands castration is expected.  

Thus it is through the repression of the Oedipus complex, and its incestuous and patricidal nature, that the uncanny presents itself most powerfully – as a result, the maternal figure, and subsequently the female figure, is the reminder of the threat of castration.

The second form within the uncanny is the confrontation with supposed surmounted or superannuated ‘primitive’ thoughts or beliefs. Through an examination of the concept of the double and the compulsion to repeat, Freud comes to the conclusion that the uncanny fear of the double, rather than being a repressed childhood memory, is an evolution from ‘an insurance against the extinction of the self,’ which stems from a primitive phase in our mental development. He writes:

> It appears that we have all, in the course of our individual development, been through a phase corresponding to the animistic phase in the development of primitive peoples, that this phase did not pass without leaving behind in us residual traces that can still make themselves felt, and that everything we now find “uncanny” meets the criterion that it is linked with these remnants of animistic mental activity and prompts them to express themselves.

Freud applies instances such as ‘chance’ or coincidences that appear to be strangely repetitive, he believes that this compulsion derives from infantile psychology and ‘depends on the essential nature of [our] drives’, yet the fact that ‘anything that can remind us of this inner compulsion to repeat is perceived as uncanny’. Freud also attributes the uncanny nature of the ‘possession’ of magical powers, ghosts, the dead body, the evil eye, madness, and the boundaries of fantasy and reality to our not-quite-surmounted beliefs.

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61 Freud, The Uncanny, op. cit., p. 140.
62 ibid., p. 142.
63 ibid., p. 147.
64 ibid., p. 145.
The most chilling of all superannuated thoughts is the ‘double’ (doppelgänger). The ‘double’ is, in Freud’s words, ‘the appearance of persons who have to be regarded as identical because they look alike’—a rather genial explanation for one of the darker embodiments of the uncanny! But Freud continues by discussing that extreme identification with another person so that a sense of self is lost is also part of the double, because ‘[t]he self may thus be duplicated, divided and interchanged.’ Freud historically interprets the double as:

...originally an insurance against the extinction of the self or, as [Otto] Rank puts it, ‘an energetic denial of the power of death’, and it seems likely that the ‘immortal’ soul was the first double of the body [...] But these ideas arose on the soil of boundless self-love, the primordial narcissism that dominates the mental life of both the child and primitive man, and when this phase is surmounted, the meaning of the ‘double’ changes: having once been an insurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death.

With relation to the double, Hélène Cixous notes that there is a strange paralleling in The Uncanny essay’s actual text which links to the Freudian uncanny as a concept. Discussing the text in Fiction and its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud’s Das Unheimliche (1976), Cixous writes that the essay is a ‘commentary on uncertainty’, and she presents an illumination on the vacillating, yet pseudo scientific, presentation of Freud’s writing. Through the uncanny’s ‘savage’ power, the text itself (or novel, as she refers to it stylistically) becomes an example of the enduring double, which restrains and overtakes the author himself. Cixous writes:

Nothing turns out less reassuring for the reader than this niggling, cautious, yet wily and interminable pursuit [...] Nor does anything prove to be more fleeting than this search whose movement constitutes the labyrinth which instigates it; the sense of strangeness imposes its secret necessity everywhere. The ensuing unfolding whose operation is contradictory is accomplished by the author’s double: Hesitation. We are faced, then, with a text and its hesitating shadow, and their double escapade.'

65 ibid., p. 141.
66 ibid., p. 142.
67 ibid., p. 142.
This is further highlighted in the ‘vicious interchange between pursued and pursuer’\textsuperscript{69} whereby Freud’s own repressions are re-presented within the text through his application of the castration complex. As Cixous notes: ‘For it is indeed a question of cutting rather than one of summarizing, as if insisting that the presence of eyes contaminated the sight that reads the text.’\textsuperscript{70} Due to the fact that Freud bases his development of the castration complex within \textit{The Sand-Man} on the supposed doppelgänger characters of the dreaded lawyer Coppelius (whom the protagonist Nathaniel believes is the mythological Sand-Man) and the similar looking optician Coppola, Cixous believes that Freud has made a ‘fatal’ error – Freud has fallen into Hoffmann’s trick – Hoffmann never confirms anything in the story because we are led to make our own interpretations. As discussed before, Freud mentions Jentsch’s concept of ‘intellectual uncertainty’ but discards it, and, rather than allowing the unknown to be part of the story, Freud ‘rejects the uncertainty’. Thus, in the words of Cixous: ‘When the unheimlich forces back the Jentschian motif, is there not, in fact, a repression of the repression [on Freud’s part]? Does not Jentsch say more than what Freud wishes to read?’\textsuperscript{71} Thus Jentsch becomes, in a way, an uncanny double that literally haunts the words of \textit{The Uncanny}.

There is another layer of this uncanny haunting as, according to Naomi Schor, Freud also (consciously or unconsciously) fraudulently manipulates Jentsch’s writing. When Freud quotes Jentsch, he deliberately ‘takes advantage of a the brief break between paragraphs to transform a general statement into a pointed reference,’\textsuperscript{72} in other words, similar to his Coppelius/Coppola insinuation, Freud inserts an assumption as fact – ‘This observation, which is undoubtedly correct, refers in particular to Hoffmann’s story \textit{The Sand-Man}\textsuperscript{73} – yet it is not correct. Schor posits that Jentsch is actually making a general statement about the technique of ‘artifice’ that Hoffmann implemented to ‘distract the reader’s attention from the source of his uncertainty, and there by maintain it for as long as possible.’\textsuperscript{74} Thus Jentsch is not talking about \textit{The Sand-Man} or Olympia at all! But what is thus striking is that, in the same essay, Freud both ‘forecloses Olympia’ (Cixous) and

\textsuperscript{69}ibid., p. 526.
\textsuperscript{70}ibid., p. 534.
\textsuperscript{71}ibid., p. 534.
\textsuperscript{73}Freud, \textit{The Uncanny}, op. cit., p. 142
\textsuperscript{74}Schor, \textit{Reading in Detail}, op. cit., p. 169.
simultaneously ‘hallucinates her presence, where she is in fact absent’ (Schor).
The presence of the feminine causes a physical rupture in Freud’s analysis.

What makes Freud’s denial/hallucination of Olympia even more striking is the fact that within both of his interpretations of the uncanny the example that Freud mostly revels in would be the uncanny nature of the female genitals, our first ‘home’ - the womb. He believes that it is here that the concept of the repetitious and unruly uncanny can be truly psychoanalytically confirmed. He writes:

> It often happens that neurotic men state that to them there is something uncanny about the female genitals. But what they find uncanny (‘unhomely’) is actually the entrance to man’s old ‘home’, the place where everyone once lived. A jocular saying has it that ‘love is a longing for home’, and if someone dreams of a certain place or a certain landscape and, while dreaming, thinks to himself, ‘I know this place, I’ve been here before’, this place can be interpreted as representing his mother’s genitals or her womb. Here too, then, the uncanny (the ‘unhomely’) is what was once familiar (‘homely’, ‘homey’). The negative prefix un- is the indicator of repression.

Thus, through familiarity, desire, and a paradoxical and parallel fear of the other – especially when we call her ‘lack’ into question – the feminine becomes the site (and sight) of extreme and repressed uncanniness.

How does this analysis of *The Uncanny* relate to *Psycho*? As mentioned before, Hitchcock’s subversion of his traditional plot (death at the end of the film), accentuates the uncanny layering in the film, as does the incomplete marriage narrative. Also, as Mulvey notes:

> Lila’s investigation into the recent past unwittingly exposes another, archaic, past hidden in the Bates house, going beyond the secret space of the detective story into the space of the unconscious. This layer of the story, a psychotic relation between mother and son, opens into the archaic uncanny that Freud would have recognised.

The rupture of familiar narrative structure throws the audience into turmoil, and the memory of the ‘correct’ plot strays on the path of the uncanny. The unconscious metaphors that Hitchcock layers into the film plot provide

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75 ibid., p. 169.
77 Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second*, op. cit., p. 95.
numerous ways to implicitly present the house as a metaphor for the unconscious, as noted by Bachelard.

Literally, the uncanny is the unhomely. This can be seen in the Motel itself as an unhomely place; it is the liminal space for travellers away from home, a short-stay environment that, however homely in its décor, is ultimately not a ‘home’. The Bates’ house is another layer of unhomely; it is dark and Gothic in its appearance and does not physically provide the comforting experience you would expect in a home. Here again, when the German ‘heimlich’ conflates with its antonym, ‘unheimlich,’ there is the home, which simultaneously denotes the place for secrets that are hidden from view and epitomizes the narrative of Mrs. Bates (or rather, her cadaver). Again, the corpse is an inanimate reminder of something, the living breathing human that is no longer, and becomes an uncanny double for the living. In another layer, the doppelgänger motif continues with Norman’s double life. His unawareness of ‘Mother’ as his other ‘half’ accentuates the repressed and uncanny nature of these actions, and even the explanation of these actions – the concept of ‘madness’ (as Freud notes) – can be seen as an uncanny layer within the plot.

There is a connection here to the castration complex also. As Barbara Creed notes, ‘Norman Bates’ desire to become the mother is motivated not by love but by fear: he wants to become the mother in order to prevent his own castration – to castrate rather than be castrated.’78 In a way then, I feel that the ‘mother’s’ knife is a metaphor for her phallus, and here again Hitchcock’s interest in the sex/death dichotomy rears its head.

The uncanny itself had a double. The ‘heimlich’ is the double for the ‘unheimlich,’ and Mulvey sees that ‘heimlich’ in its dual form is a space of enclosure, ‘the home encloses and thus gives comfort while the secret is enclosed and thus hidden,’79 it is the repression of something that was ‘once familiar,’ but now is a source of horror. As the maternal body in Psycho is conflated with the home, and her familiarity and enclosure denotes a comforting position, Psycho presents us with her other side, her duality, the enclosing and monstrous nature of ‘our first home.’ In Psycho, ‘the mother’s body and the ultimate problem of death, the end, becomes conflated with that other problem, the maternal and human beginnings.’80 Returning to the

79 Mulvey, Death 24x a Second, op. cit., p. 96.
80 ibid., p. 89.
cellar, as discussed in the beginning of this chapter, this hidden room – with its frightening candlelit journey down into it – becomes a metaphor for the female genitals.

The Grotesque

The maternal body as monstrous leads us to another literary concept to describe horror – the grotesque. The uncanny’s link to the female body, particularly the genitals, as site of fear is connected to the etymology of the word grotto-esque. The word ‘grotesque’ can be traced back to the word grotto – a small cavernous hole or structure resembling a cave. As Mary Russo explicates in her book, The Female Grotesque (1994), there is a deep-rooted relationship between maternal femininity and the history of grotesque imagery. ‘As bodily metaphor, the grotesque cave tends to look like (and in the gross metaphorical sense be identified with) the cavernous anatomical female body.’

To explain the background of the term, ‘grotto-esque’ was first applied to the fifteenth-century excavation of Nero’s Domus Aurea in Rome. This historic event catapulted the concept of the grotesque into mainstream art history, yet its findings became irrelevant until there was a reawakening and analysis of grotesque aesthetics in the Renaissance. Russo notes that, in the Renaissance, the category of the grotesque:

...emerged only later in the renewed interest in aesthetic treatises such as Vitruvius’ De Architectura (ca. 27 B.C.), which linked the classical style with the natural order and, in contrast, pointed to the grotesque as a repository of unnatural, frivolous, and irrational connections between things which nature and classical art kept scrupulously apart. It emerged, in other words, only in relation to the norms which it exceeded.

The grotesque is a fascinating word and concept, stemming from art history, yet extending into literary theory and common speech due to its liminality and polyvalent interpretations. I find Geoffrey Galt Harpham’s explanation very insightful. He writes:

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82 Ibid., p. 3.
The word [grotesque] itself betrays an irreducible queerness. As an adjective it has no descriptive value; its sole function is to represent a condition of overcrowding or contradiction in the place where the modifier should be. This place can never be occupied by any other single adjective but only by a number of adjectives not normally found together. The grotesque is concept without form: the word nearly always modifies such indeterminate nouns as monster, object or thing. As a noun it implies that an object either occupies multiple categories or that it falls between categories; it implies the collision of other nouns, or the impossibility of finding a synonym, nothing more. Before we can ask how the grotesque “functions” or how it is “used,” we must recognise that grotesques have no consistent properties other than their own grotesqueness, and that they do not manifest predictable behaviour. The word designates a condition of being just out of focus, just beyond the reach of language. It accommodates the things left over when the categories of language are exhausted; it is a defence against silence when other words have failed. In any age – this one, for example – its widespread use indicates that significant portions of experience are eluding satisfactory verbal formulation.83

While Harpham’s use of the word ‘queer’ denotes ‘odd’ in this context, I would like to note here that the study of gothic and horror has an interesting conflation with the study of homosexuality, a concept that I will explore throughout this thesis, particularly in Chapter Four.

A key, and possibly most well-known, theorist in the study of the grotesque was Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin’s book Rabelais and His World was first published in 1968, as a literary analysis of the writer Francois Rabelais (1490-1553), but what stood out to readers from this book is Bakhtin’s use of the term carnivalesque as a conceptual model to explore Rabelais’ writing. Bakhtin writes:

Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world’s revival and renewal, in which all take part. Such is the essence of carnival, vividly felt by all its participants.84

The carnival was seen by Bakhtin as a political concept to describe social formations in public and political theory. A ‘temporary liberation’ from the

‘established order’ stemming from folk humour, it was the ‘suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions.’ Through Rabelais and his carnivalesque imagery, Bakhtin discusses the relationship between the use of language in the fifteenth and sixteenth century. In the fifteenth century there was an age of ‘considerable freedom’, while the structures of language became stricter leading into the sixteenth. A movement of genre in the seventeenth century caused the carnivalesque to be eradicated from writing:

The new bodily canon [of the seventeenth century], in all its historic variations and different genres, presents an entirely finished, completed strictly limited body, which is shown from the outside as something individual. That which protrudes, bulges, sprouts, or branches off (when a body transgresses its limits and a new one begins) is eliminated, hidden or moderated. All orifices of the body are closed. […] The verbal norms of official and literary language, determined by the canon, prohibit all that is linked with fecundation, pregnancy, childbirth. There is a sharp line of division between familiar speech and “correct” language.

Opposed to this closed off individual nature in the seventeenth century, Bakhtin believes that Rabelais’ carnivalesque imagery, and subsequently Bakhtin’s formulation of ‘grotesque realism’, implies the fluidity of subjectivity. He believes that the body/mind dichotomy present in the seventeenth century is not the grotesque definition of a person, in fact, the grotesque ‘person’ is only a part of a whole – humanity is based on the ‘theory of the ancestral body’. As Bakhtin notes ‘the grotesque conception of the body is interwoven not only with the cosmic but also with the social, utopian, and historic theme, and above all with the theme of the change of epochs and the renewal of culture.’

The grotesque has always been tinged with laughter. Bakhtin notes that as it is structured around the ‘lower bodily stratum’ and of ‘low art,’ ‘laughter degrades and materializes.’ The seventeenth century saw the previous movement from parody as laughter that positively ‘degraded to regenerate,’ to an ‘enlightened’ bitter sarcasm and mocking which was the opposite of carnivalesque actions. Bakhtin believes the grotesque (literally) embodies the regenerative power of laughter, and its power for change and universal

85 ibid., p. 10.
86 ibid., p. 320.
87 ibid., p. 320.
88 ibid., p. 323.
89 ibid., p. 323-324.
90 ibid., p. 20.
‘becoming.’ Writing in 1985, Frances K. Barasch discusses the comic element of the grotesque. She writes:

…the grotesque is a "moment" in literature (as in art) that is manifested in image or event and functions as an "objective correlative of ludicrous-horror." In the best or purest grotesque, conflicting elements of ludicrous-horror occur simultaneously, producing in the reader a confused and uneasy tension between laughter and fear or disgust.91

Writing through Bakhtin, Barasch sees the grotesque presented in literature as a balance between ‘light and dark,’ the light presents us with ‘mild disgust and a titter’, while darker grotesque is represented by violent death and mutilation which, when comedic, produces a ‘dual effect in the reader that is akin to hysteria.’92 These two formats vary in differing degrees in literature but generally accumulate to create a feeling of self-destruction. The grotesque, for Barasch, should inherently be understood as a comic genre, and should acknowledge the sinister-made-ludicrous, but it contains in itself a realisation that the sinister will never be destroyed. It aim is to create a balance between the binaries of good/evil, life/death and hope/despair. Barasch believes that the comic element of the grotesque is:

…the saving element, [it is] a creative vision in the face of destructive forces. [...] For the grotesque genre has always been a reflection of creative possibility, of hope over human anguish: in our era, it is perhaps the only positive expression in a potentially self-destructive world.93

Its liminality, however, makes the grotesque out of the comedic and the comedic out of the grotesque, so that comedy can make the horror even more monstrous than thought possible.

For Bakhtin, the definition of the grotesque can be demonstrated by the Kerch terracotta collection. Within the series, Bakhtin saw figurines of ‘senile pregnant hags.’ He writes:

…the old hags are laughing. This is a typical and very strongly expressed grotesque. It is ambivalent. It is pregnant death, a death that gives birth. There is nothing completed, nothing calm and stable in the bodies of these old hags. They combine a senile, decaying

92 ibid.
93 ibid., p. 9.
and deformed flesh with the flesh of new life, conceived but as yet unformed. Life is shown in its twofold contradictory process; it is the epitome of incompleteness. And such is precisely the grotesque concept of the body.94

These women are presented as a binary opposition to the cold, intellectualized, and reason-based masculine of the Enlightenment and modernity – they are feminine, transitional, uneducated, incomplete, ridiculous, and ultimately liminal. Or as Bataille notes:

Is [giving birth] not [...] something excessive and outside the orderly course of permitted activity? Does it not imply the denial of the established order, and denial without which there could be no transition from nothingness to being, or from being to nothingness?95

The presumed positivism of the grotesque towards the visceral, sexual, pregnant, liminal, and disgusting female body posits the question, why? When the uncanny presents it as a sight of horror and fear, why does the grotesque, or rather Bakhtin, place disgust as its highest point? I would propose here that, like the uncanny’s reliance on fear that regurgitates and (re)manifests itself due to the Enlightenment’s refutation of witchcraft – the supernatural and the occult (which is discussed by the superannuated beliefs humanity denies), the Bakhtinian grotesque is using this same fear and disgust as an ironic ‘cleansing’ of the denial and rigidity of the Enlightenment. Rather than a source of pleasure, or desire, the female body in the grotesque represents the monstrosity that challenges stringent political and economic structures that otherwise cannot be broken down. Carnivalesque is exactly what a carnival does, it intermingles class, race, gender. But its main focus is on degradation. Bakhtin believes that this degradation is the essential principle of the grotesque; it is the ‘lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity.’96 As the feminine is already perceived as monstrous, disgusting, and other, she becomes the mascot for ‘error’ (to use Mary Russo’s term). So, while the female body is heralded as a forceful tool for rebellion, her power is not used for her benefit – she will not be integrated into society as an equal, because the grotesque still places the feminine as site (and sight) of the most extreme degrading horror.97

95 Bataille, Erotism, op. cit., p. 54.
96 Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, op. cit., p. 20.
97 It is interesting to not that Wolfgang Kayser’s book, The Grotesque in Art and Literature (1963), sees the grotesque as more akin to the uncanny. His proposition was that the grotesque is alien,
This negative representation of degradation can be seen in Rabelais and His World, however unintentionally. Bakhtin uses an unusual quote to elucidate the grotesque in Rabelais’s writing. Rabelais writes:

I have observed the pleasure-twats of women in this part of the world are much cheaper than stones. Therefore, the walls should be built of twats, symmetrically and according to the rules of architecture, the largest to go in front. Next, on a downward slope like the back of an ass, the medium-sized, and last of all, the least and smallest. These should be made to dovetail and interlace, [in a] diamond-shape.98

It is interesting to see Bakhtin’s response to this piece of text; he believes that Rabelais was not interested in the ‘cheapness of Paris women,’ nor was he condemning them for being prostitutes, but rather Rabelais was evoking the grotesque quality of ‘the human body becom[ing] a building material, [so that] the limits between the body and the world are weakened.’99 Bakhtin also puts forward that Rabelais uses the female genitals as a metaphor for the need for increased procreation as a military defence: ‘The leading theme is fecundity, as the greatest and safest array of strength.’100 What? Cannot Bakhtin see that the use of language in this quote, while it may suggest in context his concept, the actual words denote a purely misogynistic vision of women. The ‘pleasure-twats’ are seen as nothing other than an object to do with what the male wants. As Bakhtin sees it, Rabelais’ grotesque literature presents the woman as ‘as low as you can go,’ she is nothing, she is already degraded and her image is there to be ridiculed and threatening, not as the ‘maternal home’ of the uncanny, but as the worst you could possibly be before losing your humanity. Bakhtin may idealistically believe that everyone should become these women, we should become weak and degraded, but he never questions how or if it was possible, this ideological proposition further alienates femininity from the already patriarchal society. As Mary Russo notes, regarding Bakhtin’s description of the ‘senile pregnant hags’, what he never asks is ‘Why are these

individual and related to the unconscious. I will not discuss it further here, as I believe that the writing on the uncanny covers the majority of Kayser’s ideas. For comparisons of the two forms of the grotesque, please see Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World (pp. 46-52) and Russo, The Female Grotesque (pp. 8-10, 32-34).

98 Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, op. cit., p. 313.
99 ibid.
100 ibid.
old hags laughing? As I will note in further chapters, these women are laughing because there is power in monstrous femininity, and Bakhtin knows it.

The imagery of the ‘twat-wall’ in Rabelais’ writing ties to the grotesque actions of the real ‘psycho’, Ed Gein. His removal of women’s vulvas and storage in a shoe-box becomes almost as if life was imitating art. Perhaps the metaphor of merely ‘a “box” within a box’ may be taking it too far, but Gein’s monstrousness, which led to the Psycho film, is exemplified in the imagery of the severed vulvas – like the grotesque, the female is reduced to her most basic function, her vagina that produces pleasure and progeny.

Yet in the actual film Psycho, the grotesque is mostly restrained. It is subtly evoked, but never explicit, it never utilizes Bakhtin’s definitions of ‘exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness’. Unlike Hitchcock’s use of overt uncanny references, the film does not use the grotesque as a visual tool until the penultimate cellar-scene, cited above. Even in the brutal murder of Marion in the most famous shower-scene it is subtle; it is lit from behind, mostly free from blood and disgust, and has no overt grotesque imagery. The cellar-scene, however, epitomizes the grotesque. Through the use of sound and movement in the scene – whereby Norman’s footsteps can be heard as Lila discovers the body of Mrs. Bates, as well as the camera’s shot-reverse-shot that constantly conflates their faces, alongside their matching clothing – ‘Mother’s’ and Norman’s bodies are represented as simultaneously one and other, ‘the inexhaustible vessel of death and conception’. This metaphor is amplified due to the mother-child dyad of renewal and re-birth. Bakhtin notes that the grotesque ‘constructs what we might call a double body. In the endless chain of bodily life it retains the parts in which one link joins the other, in which the life of one body is born from the death of the preceding, older one’. In this scene, Psycho ‘embodies’ this. The mother dies and the son becomes her, he is her grotesque replacement – the point of intersection between here and gone. Even the comedic element of Norman’s ‘reveal’ – whereby he struggles with Sam, displaying his very male suit under Mother’s nightgown with his cheap wig falling to the floor – presents us with a heightened horrific moment. While the pathetic nature of the monstrous murderer is revealed, our fears are not

101 Russo, The Female Grotesque, op. cit., p. 73.
102 Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, op. cit., p. 303.
103 Ibid., p. 318.
104 Ibid.
alleviated; in fact, his ridiculously comedic and feeble appearance makes him even more grotesque and frightening because he is not the ‘typical’ image of a killer.

The gaping mouth of Mrs. Bates is another layer of the grotesque, her jagged teeth and her monstrous grimace denotes the ‘grotesque face’ itself. Bakhtin believes that the grotesque face is reduced to the gaping mouth; the rest of the face merely encases this ‘wide-open bodily abyss.’ Because the mouth is related to the ‘lower bodily stratum,’ it becomes the ‘open gate leading into the bodily underworld.’ This frightening, genital-like mouth also links to the cellar, as I discussed above, as Bakhtin notes that the cellar is a medieval image for the ‘fruit-bearing’ womb, and it links to the theme of ‘death, of swallowing down.’ These images are simultaneously represented as the ‘entrance to the underworld, the gaping mouth of Satan, [and] the “jaws of hell”’.

The most extreme form of grotesque in the cellar-scene is the alluded-to laughter of Mrs. Bates’ mummified body. The swinging light bulb in the room animates her gaping cavernous mouth causing movement, and evokes and invokes the laughing hag of grotesque realism. Her laughter positions her in the state between life and death, a liminal status of subject and object. Yet, as Russo notes, Bakhtin forgets to question why the hags are laughing, and Mrs. Bates’ monstrosity subsequently becomes more than the Bakhtinian grotesque can express. How then can we look at this figure?

Bakhtin and Freud both see the feminine as monstrous, but neither give her the power to go beyond it. What Bakhtin’s grotesque does not do, is try to understand why the feminine is horrific, it merely positions her as degraded. Similarly, the uncanny places the female genitals as ‘our first home’ that has become horrific through repression, but Freud does not expand on this in his essay, and he actually believes in the mere denial of such a place. As Bracha L. Ettinger scathingly notes:

Freud did not deny the denial of the womb as a female body specificity, nor did he deny its implications. On the contrary, he insisted on the importance of such a denial, on its necessity! The magnitude of the denial gives us the measure for what is at stake for the male person. For the (universal neutral) child (who happens to have a penis) the idea that the womb belongs to the woman would

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105 ibid., p. 317.
106 ibid., p. 325.
107 ibid., p. 329.
be a catastrophic blow to narcissism, inasmuch as the child believes that he owns every possible organ of value. The child must therefore, says Freud, deny the womb and take up the belief that children come from the anus (even if, so the theory goes, the child happens to be a girl who has a womb). Thus, the infantile scenario of childbirth without a womb (from the anus) preserves “neutral” narcissism and in the same move saves univocal, “neutral” psychoanalytical theory.108

What a lot of denial! Yet, what stands out in both the uncanny and the grotesque, however, is the metaphor of the double. The double as other. This otherness in Freud is the monstrous doppelgänger that haunts us as a ‘harbinger of death’, and similarly the Bakhtinian double is the simultaneity of death in life. As Bakhtin notes in the move from the carnivalesque into the Enlightenment:

The duality of the body is preserved only in one theme, a pale reflection of its formal dual nature. This is the theme of nursing a child. But the image of the mother and the child is strictly individualized and closed, the line of demarcation cannot be removed. This as completely new phase of the artistic conception of bodily interaction.109

The Enlightenment saw the imagery of the double (or dyad) as threateningly monstrous to a ‘completed’ subject, and its repercussions expand into contemporary society. This dyad, however, is the power behind the state of abjection. Julia Kristeva’s *chora* is the only remaining bodily interchange, the mother and child, traceable from the religious iconography of Mary and Jesus, and is the only (post-seventeenth century) rem(a)inder of the duality of Bakhtin’s grotesque bodies. The abject presents the monstrous feminine as a longing to return to the mother’s body.

**The Abject**

Kristeva’s multidisciplinary oeuvre – which spans philosophy, psychoanalysis, and literature – focuses on two main concepts, the ‘semiotic’ and the abject. Abjection and its application in horror theory is a key element in this thesis, but I believe Kristeva’s other key concept is also very relevant here, as it ties into and leads out from abjection.

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As a development from Saussure and the linguistic discipline of semiotics (sign/signifier/signified), Kristeva’s ‘semiotic’ (She terms it le sémiotique – unlike Saussure’s la sémiotique) is based in psychoanalysis, this amalgamation of the two concepts she calls ‘semanalysis’. According to Kristeva, the semiotic opposes the symbolic order. The symbolic order is The Law of the Father, to quote Lacan. For her, the symbolic is the Saussurian element of language that corresponds words with their meanings, including syntax and grammar, while the semiotic is the linguistic place in which the unconscious drives are present; rather than denoting literal meanings, the semiotic conveys an emotional experience that is expressed by tone, rhythm and prosody of language. The vacillation between the symbolic filled with meaning but no feeling, and the semiotic with its emotion and no comprehension fuels the (pre-subjective) child into expressing its emotions through language.

The Kristevan semiotic challenges Lacanian theories. By exploring the experience before the mirror stage, Kristeva posits that pleasure and its excess (jouissance) causes the child to begin to formulate its transition into language. She believes that the mirror stage, in which the child develops a sense of autonomy through realization that the mother is other, which subsequently and simultaneously brings about lack and desire, cannot be the only form of language development otherwise the child would be severely psychotic and not want to leave the mother (an allusion to Norman Bates). Kristeva writes that through the actions of the mother, the child receives a ‘law before the Law’, whereby the mother’s restrictions of the breast or toilet training has positioned the child in preparation for entry into the symbolic order/Law of the Father. At the same time, the child battles with the wish to return to the pre-Symbolic chora - an overwhelming desire to return to the indifferetration between mother and child’s bodies.

Like the vying between semiotic and the symbolic, or rather as part of this development of language, this battle between maternal indifferetration and autonomy, leads us to abjection. In Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection, Kristeva writes:

The abject confronts us ... with our earliest attempts to release the hold of maternal entity even before ex-isting outside of her, thanks to the autonomy of language. It is a violent, clumsy breaking away,
with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling.\textsuperscript{110}

The abject can be traced from Freud’s theory of the Oedipus complex, yet has a Lacanian interpretation. The Oedipus complex takes its name from Sophocles’s fifth century BC tragedy entitled \textit{Oedipus Rex}. The plot revolves around Oedipus who is estranged from his family as he has been destined to kill his father. Without realizing, Oedipus fulfils his destiny by killing his father and unintentionally marrying his mother. Freud describes a child’s desire to complete such acts of incest and patricide, through the belief that its father is a rival for its mother’s sexual desire. What is relevant here to the abject is that the desire for the mother has been ‘challenged’ by the father, which posits a place before the Oedipus complex, the pre-Oedipal phase, a phase in which the child and mother are ‘one’, or rather, a time when the child does not realize the autonomy or boundary between itself and the mother. As Kelly Hurley notes:

The subject confronting the abject is torn between two ontological possibilities: one which is rigidly invested in the construct of a stable self-identity, one which is attracted to the turbulence, chaos, and indifferentiation associated with pre-Oedipality.\textsuperscript{111}

Lacan denies this twosome, as he believes that the child is never alone with the mother, as the imaginary Phallus must make up the psychoanalytical triangular structure theory (Pre-Oedipal = mother-child-phallus, Oedipal = mother-child-father\textsuperscript{112}), but Freud and Kristeva see the pre-Oedipal as this dyadic space. Kristeva calls this the ‘chora’. She explicates:

Discrete quantities of energy move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such, and in the course of his development, they are arranged according to the various constraints imposed on this body – always already involved in a semiotic process – by family and social structures. In this way the instinctual drives, which are “energy” charges as well as “psychical” marks, articulate what we call a chora: a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is full of movement as it is regulated.\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{111} Kelly Hurley, \textit{The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle}, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 44.
Yet unlike the Freudian timing of the Oedipus Complex (three to five years old), according to Kristeva the chora is ruptured by the Lacanian mirror stage which takes place in the child from six to 18 months old.\textsuperscript{114} The chora is the undifferentiated emotional space with the mother whereby the drives are in control and unrestricted (being within mental state of the Freudian id), yet it is ‘under siege from the symbolic’, and the ‘unity must be ruptured’\textsuperscript{115} if autonomy and identity is to be sourced. The rupture through the chora by the mirror stage, thus becomes the ‘fundamental aspect of subjectivity,’\textsuperscript{116} and describes the entry into the symbolic order and the ‘formation of the ego via the process of identification; the ego is the result of identifying with one’s own specular image.’\textsuperscript{117}

Kristeva’s concept of the chora, while difficult to understand due to her changing and evolving explanations, can in some ways explicate the abject, as the chora itself can be positioned in two temporal states. The first state is the pre-Oedipal or pre-Symbolic, as I have mentioned above. The second state in which we may find the (post-symbolic) chora is a subject being overwhelmed by the abject. It is the ‘force that assails language and meaning, the negativity that threatens to collapse both the je and the moi.’\textsuperscript{118} Or as Kristeva writes, ‘abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be.’\textsuperscript{119} Thus the chora, while pleasurable and unrestricted in

\textsuperscript{114} ‘The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation—and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic—and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject’s entire mental development.’ Jacques Lacan, Écrits, Routledge, London, 2001, p. 3. The Lacanian mirror stage can be defined as the child’s relation to his/her image. The child discovers its image in the mirror and begins to form subjectivity, albeit through a fractured and incomplete image of self. The mirror stage creates three states: the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary. The Imaginary denotes the idealised image from the mirror stage, in which the child imagines itself as a whole, unfractured body. The Symbolic is the order in which the child uses language and symbols to define a sense of subjectivity. The Real is defined as what is not within either the Symbolic or the Imaginary, and is a state before language and thus cannot be defined through language, and is before subjectivity. The Real is thus the space that Kristeva alludes to in her theory of abjection.


\textsuperscript{116} Evans, An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis, op.cit., p. 115.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{118} Silverman, The Acoustic Mirror, op. cit., p. 104.

\textsuperscript{119} Kristeva, Powers of Horror, op. cit., p.10.
the pre-Symbolic, becomes in the post-Symbolic ‘a vortex of summons and repulses [that] places the one haunted by it literally beside himself.’

As the pre-subjective child tries to make sense of itself, the construction of ‘I’ and ‘not-I’ becomes difficult. It attempts to expel ‘not-I’ as ‘other’, but seeing as they are not completely defined, there is a moment of ‘self-repudiation,’ ‘I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion through which “[I]” claim to establish myself. [...] “[I]” am in the process of becoming an other at the expense of my own death. During that course in which “[I]” become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit.’

The child experiences itself as the abject and it must be cast off, again ‘in order to be.’ Thus ‘the abject simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject.’

A key focus in Powers of Horror is the position of the female body as abject. Kristeva discusses the connection between the feminine body and the rituals of purity and defilement. Inspired greatly by Mary Douglas’ book Purity and Danger (1966), Kristeva appropriated many of the experiences of female monstrosity, alongside religious and social references from Douglas’ findings. Through an analysis of ‘primitive’ peoples, Douglas explores social structures and the limits and boundaries that these entail. Her work is focused on how dirt and pollution is relational, it has no universal absolute, but rather it is constructed through social orders. Nothing is actually dirty, in the generic sense, but it is that which is out of context and thus confusing and disturbing to these orders. These pollutants are thus analogies for the basis of social order. Douglas notes that there are many cultures that are afraid of the opposite sex because it is other, particularly body orifices and the bodily fluids of women. She writes:

I believe that ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, about and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created.

The binaries set up by cultures are a way to organize experiences. They become impure when they are liminal. Thus, through an analysis of Purity and Danger, Kristeva develops Douglas’ theories, and reinterprets her findings. Yet,

120 ibid., p. 1.
121 ibid., p. 3.
122 ibid., p. 5.
having rejected language differences and the Freudian premises of ‘semantic values connected with the psychosomatic functioning of the speaking subject,’ Douglas does not manage to convince Kristeva of how the structures of subjectivity work, and Powers of Horror systematically works through Purity and Danger to connect language, subjectivity, and its relation to the symbolic order.

Yet, what Kristeva does seem to appropriate is Douglas’ theory that there is a power in the liminal status of pollution – it is indefinable, ambiguous and ultimately hazardous. Douglas writes that ‘(d)anger lies in transitional states, simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable. The person who must pass from one to another is himself in danger and emanates danger to others.’

Take, for example, the unborn child. Its present position is ambiguous, its future equally. For no one can say what sex it will have or whether it will survive the hazards of infancy. It is often treated as both vulnerable and dangerous. The Lele [tribe from the Democratic Republic of Congo] regard the unborn child and its mother as in constant danger, but they also credit the unborn child with capricious ill-will which makes it a danger to others. When pregnant, a Lele woman tries to be considerate about not approaching sick persons lest the proximity of the child in her womb causes coughing or fever to increase. Among the Nyakyusa [tribe from Tanzania] a similar belief is recorded. A pregnant woman is thought to reduce the quantity of grain she approaches, because the foetus in her is voracious and snatches it. She must not speak to people who are reaping or brewing without first making a ritual gesture of good will to cancel the danger. They speak of the foetus ‘with jaws agape’ snatching the food, and explain it by the inevitability of the ‘seed within’ fighting the ‘seed without’.

Thus, through an interpretive reading of Douglas, Kristeva argues that the maternal body is the first site of the abject; in fact, abjection is created in the separation of the child’s body from the mother’s. As the child must become part of the symbolic order of language, s/he must renounce the mother so as to establish autonomous subjectivity. This is done by ‘ejecting the abject’ and establishing a ‘clean and proper body’, denouncing the connection between the child and mother through feelings of disgust towards the ‘indifferentiation’ between their bodies. Within the chora, the oral and anal drives dominate the

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124 Kristeva, Powers of Horror, op. cit., p.5.
125 Douglas, Purity and Danger, op. cit., p. 119.
126 ibid., p. 118-119.
child’s body; these drives are controlled by the mother and are ‘structured around the mother’s body.’

The mother’s body is therefore what mediates the symbolic law organizing social relations and becomes the ordering principle of the semiotic chora, which is on the path of destruction, aggressivity, and death. For although drives have been described as disunited or contradictory structures, simultaneously ‘positive’ and ‘negative,’ this doubling is said to generate a dominant “destructive wave” that is the drive’s most characteristic trait: Freud notes that the most instinctual drive is the death drive.

Here then, physically, abjection can be defined as disgust that arises from the human psyche by looking at rotting food, bodily wastes, blood, and the dead body itself, due to the glimpse into the unconscious mind that harbours the death drive. This emotion of disgust is a defence mechanism against a breakdown between binaries such as subject and object or self and other - the corpse being the definitive example, as it is a subject that has been transformed into an object and, subsequently is an allusion to our mortality that must be expelled or negated via disgust. ‘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.’ As such, abjection is that which disturbs identity, it is ‘what does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.’ The three main concepts of abjection have common links, the first being food loathing, the ‘skin of the milk’, ingesting rotting food, or loathsome abject fluids such as blood, urine, faeces. The second includes the corpse, the disease, violence and death. These objects erase the borders between life and death. The third concept is the most monstrous, the maternal body. She is the ‘phallic’ mother who threatens as she protects, expels and attempts to ingest. Her dichotomous liminality creates a fear that cannot be assimilated into the conscious mind, and causes the subject to fear for its latent (or even developed) subjectivity. Even a lactating or menstruating woman may cause the rupture of this subjectivity. Anything that recalls the time in which the child was pre-subjective evokes abjection. Thus the maternal body, and subsequently the female body in general, becomes a constant reminder of the possible loss of subjectivity, which equates to death.

128 Ibid., p. 454-455.
129 Kristeva, Powers of Horror, op. cit., p. 3.
130 Ibid., p. 4.
The uncanny and the abject are, and have been, very much linked, with people even erroneously using them as synonyms. The double, which has a lingering connection with both the uncanny and the grotesque, is still present in abjection, as Hurley notes:

Kristeva usefully deploys the concept of the border to delineate the ambiguous are between life/death, repression/release, and control/disruption. This may be seen within the framework of doubles and dualities (i.e. The Uncanny), which represent the tension between the human subject and the monster.\textsuperscript{131}

While they have common psychoanalytical roots, Kristeva denies a connection between abjection and the uncanny by writing: ‘Essentially different from “uncanniness,” more violent, too, abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory.’\textsuperscript{132} Yet there is a powerful overlap between the two concepts. Both are based on a reaction with encountering the other; while abjection is based on the disgust that arises from the self/other differentiation, the uncanny is the ‘return of the repressed.’ Yet what is repressed in the uncanny? Freud writes that the uncanny ‘...hark[s] back to single phases in the evolution of the self, a regression to times when the ego had not yet clearly set itself off against the world outside and from others,’\textsuperscript{133} thus the uncanny, being both repressed and surmounted memories, recalls the Kristevan chora and has its basis in the id. Abjection, as I have mentioned above, also lies in the pre-Symbolic state of the id.

What does differ in abjection is Kristeva’s focus on the entry into the Symbolic order. Stemming from Lacan’s proposition that the unconscious is structured like a language, Kristeva believes that the abject returns us to the state where ‘meaning collapses’; it is the time before we are able to understand symbolic language.

Fear cements [the child’s] compound, conjoined to another world, thrown up, driven out, forfeited. What he has swallowed up instead of maternal love is an emptiness, or rather a maternal hatred without a word for the words of the father; that is what he tries to cleanse himself of, tirelessly.\textsuperscript{134}

\textsuperscript{131} Wells, The Horror Genre, op. cit., p. 16.
\textsuperscript{132} Kristeva, Powers of Horror, op. cit., p. 5.
\textsuperscript{133} Freud, The Uncanny, op. cit., p. 143.
\textsuperscript{134} Kristeva, Powers of Horror, op. cit., p. 6.
Here the ‘failure to recognise’ becomes more about the inability to verbalise. Yet Kristeva goes further into this incapacity to articulate by stating:

The ‘unconscious’ contents remain here excluded but in strange fashion: not radically enough to allow for a secure differentiation between subject and object, and yet clearly enough for a defensive position to be established – one that implies a refusal but also a sublimation elaboration. As if the fundamental opposition were between I and Other or, in more archaic fashion, between Inside and Outside.\footnote{ibid., p. 7.}

Here Kristeva utilizes Lacan’s developments of the Freudian model, so that a comparison between abjection and uncanny becomes more difficult. Taking the Lacanian linguistic perspective, Kristeva positions the Symbolic order as the impossibility to relate to the other – the structures of the Symbolic rigidify (both literally and metaphorically) the borders between self and other. This attempted stiffening between self and other denotes a physical bodily reaction to the other – abjection embeds within it the powerful emotion of disgust, a word that is hardly ever mentioned in the Freudian uncanny. It seems as if both Freud and Kristeva are trying to posit an explanation for the same emotion of fear, but disgust is the most important factor in understanding abjection. This disgust is our defence mechanism against the loss of subjectivity; it is an archaic or primal urge to escape from a danger that threatens the self. What is interesting in the differences between the uncanny, the abject, and the grotesque, is this relation to subjectivity. Kristeva’s abject deals with the loss of subjectivity, as does the uncanny. The grotesque works in the same way, however the loss of oneself is a positive amalgam, it is a joining in the social that creates a whole. Katerina Clark sees the differences between Freud and Bakhtin as being ‘polar opposites’, she writes: ‘In Freud, self is suppressed in the service of the social; in Bahktin self is precisely a function of the social. In Freud, the more of the other, the less of the self; in Bakhtin, the more of the other, the more of the self.\footnote{Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, Mikhail Bakhtin, Harvard University Press, Cambridge & London, 1984, p. 206.} Kristeva’s concept of subjectivity is challenged by the abject, but her response is to explore this boundary, to push the questions of the autonomous ‘self.’ The power in the abject is its potential for the unknown. As Kelly Hurley notes:
The prefix ‘ab-’ [in ab-jection] signals a movement away from a site or condition, and thus a loss. But a movement away is also a movement towards – towards a site or condition as yet unspecified – and thus entails both a threat and a promise.137

Everyone knows that danger makes something more exciting. More so than the uncanny’s primitive shiver, or the grotesque’s societal fluidity, it is the abject’s literal ‘brush with death’ through language (which constitutes the self) that excites the subject as much as it frightens.

Kristeva’s abject’s connection to language reminds me of Harpham’s quote about the Gothic ‘…the word designates a condition of being just out of focus, just beyond the reach of language.’ This evokes the abject, pre-Symbolic, and epitomizes the use of the abject within Gothic constructs. Furthermore, Kelly Hurley conflates the Gothic into abjection as she sees that the Gothic is positioned in an ‘ambivalence’, it is ‘convulsed by nostalgia for the “fully human” subject whose undoing it accomplishes so resolutely, and yet aroused by the prospect of a monstrous becoming’.138 Again, like the uncanny, we return to the Gothic as a visual representation for the emotional state of abjection.

As I discussed earlier, there are distinct differences between sublimity and horror. Rather than the emotion of the sublime, the abject is the horrific. As Kristeva notes, abjection is the emotion felt where ‘nothing is familiar,’ whereas the sublime has ‘something added that expands us, overstrains us. […] A divergence, an impossible boundary.’ It is the memory of something that causes a split in the self, rather than the abject’s inability to understand the pre-subjective chora. Kristeva notes that there are similarities, however:

If the abject is already a wellspring of sign for a non-object, on the edges of primal repression, one can understand its skirting the somatic symptom on the one hand and sublimation on the other. The symptom: a language that gives up, a structure within the body, a non-assimilable alien, a monster, a tumor, a cancer that the listening devices of the unconscious do not hear, for its strayed subject is huddled outside the paths of desire. Sublimation, on the contrary, is nothing else than the possibility of naming the prenominal, the pre-objectal, which are in fact only a trans-nominal, a trans-objectal. In the symptom, the abject permeates me, I become abject. Through sublimation, I keep it under control. The abject is edged with the sublime. It is not the same moment on the

journey, but the same subject and speech bring them into being.\textsuperscript{139}

This quote can then, in some ways, explicate the difference between horror and terror that I began to discuss earlier. As Kristeva believes, sublime terror is about subjective possession and the possibility of ‘naming’ of the frightening experience logically, whereas abject horror is the threatening lack of self, constituted before language that thus becomes unnameable and abjectly monstrous because of that.

In \textit{Psycho}, Norman is entirely abject; or rather he is when he is Norma. He has allowed his mother to take over, he has lost his subjectivity, he is no longer an ‘I’; throughout the duration of the film he is slowly being converted into ‘not-I’ – becoming ‘other’ to himself. Through his literal and physical loss of ‘not-I’ (the death of Mrs. Bates), he simultaneously creates an unconscious loss of ‘I’ (loss of himself). In the end of the film, the transformation is complete; he is ‘Mother.’ The final moment of the film ends in a metaphorical and psychoanalytical death, not a physical one – the mise-en-scene presents Mrs. Bates’ mummified head superimposed onto Norman’s and this image, as Laura Mulvey notes, ‘marks The End.’\textsuperscript{140} Yes, it is as she believes ‘movement stilled, the animate transformed into the inanimate,’ but it is not the end in terms of the uncanny which Mulvey discusses, but rather, I believe it is the end of Norman’s losing battle against abjection.

Norman’s stuttering and stammering speech throughout the film evokes his decaying sense of self, he loses his identity and his final scream ‘Ayeeeeeeeee am Norma Bates!’ (the last lines recorded by Norman’s actor Anthony Perkins) denotes the ultimate deterioration of ‘Norman’. This loss of language can be seen in Kristeva’s abject, she writes:

\begin{quote}
Through the mouth that I fill with words instead of my mother whom I miss from now on more than ever, I elaborate that want, and the aggressivity that accompanies it, by saying. […] Verbalization has always been confronted with the “ab-ject” that the phobic object is. Language learning takes place as an attempt to appropriate an oral “object” that slips away and whose hallucination, necessarily deformed, threatens us from the outside.\textsuperscript{141}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{139} Kristeva, \textit{Powers of Horror}, op. cit., p. 11.
\textsuperscript{140} Mulvey, \textit{Death 24x A Second}, op. cit., p. 96.
\textsuperscript{141} Kristeva, \textit{Powers of Horror}, op. cit., p. 41.
\end{flushright}
Language itself is constructed through a loss of the mother, and the ‘return to her’ in Psycho through Norman’s psychosis presents us with this loss of the Symbolic. The voice thus makes us aware that from this moment in the film, Norman is no longer Norman but a dualistic impression of ‘Mother.’ Our fear while watching Psycho is the fact that it presents us with the unconscious desire to return to the maternal.

As I mentioned before, the narrative of Psycho is double – Norman’s and Marion’s – as Mulvey and Raymond Bellour point out, yet, according to Barbara Creed, there is a hidden third story, the mother’s/‘Mother’s’. The third story is simply crucial to our understanding of the film, because it posits the mother’s story as always ‘part of another story, the son’s story.’ I would like to note here that Norman and Norma’s mother/son relationship is not as abject as a mother/daughter relationship (it becomes doubly abject with two females), but this will be explored more in Chapter Two. In the case of Psycho, we never truly glean the mother’s story – it is only the interpretive psychotic appropriation of her in Norman’s mind that we ever see. Yet, it is, as Creed notes, the fear of the abjecting ‘maternal gaze’ that frightens Norman so. This look interrogates Norman’s sexual desires, and it is this ‘aspect of the mother, her probing gaze, that he tries to kill in other women.’

Norman’s matricide presents us with both a dichotomous abject quality of killing what you love, and also a protection of self that had been threatened by the mother. As I have noted before, Kristeva believes that there is a simultaneous dichotomous hatred and need for the mother, which causes abjection in the first place:

Fear cements his compound, conjoined to an other world, thrown up, forfeited. What he has swallowed up instead of maternal love is an emptiness, or rather a maternal hatred without a word for the words of the father; that is what he tries to cleanse himself of tirelessly.

The murder and taxidermy of the mother shows us both desire and hatred, but unfortunately for Norman, ‘Mother’ is still ever present, physically as the ‘mummified’ corpse and psychically as his ‘alter-ego’. The projection of ‘Mother’, denotes a ‘revolt of being,’ it is the ‘repulsion [that] places the one

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142 Creed, The Monstrous-Feminine, op. cit., p. 141.
143 Ibid.
144 Kristeva, Powers of Horror, op. cit., p. 6.
haunted by [abjection] literally beside himself.\textsuperscript{145} But rather than being haunted, Norman is no more. He has been ejected, rejected, abjected.

The personification of birds, which constantly represents both the mother and Marion in various stages throughout the film, while also being a derogatory name for female, again connotes a quality of the abject. Abjection deals with ‘those fragile states where man strays on the territories of animal,’\textsuperscript{146} and according to Kristeva, primitive societies believe that animals and animalism simultaneously imply sex and murder, thus these societies abject these representations. Norman conflates Mrs. Bates with the image of the predatory bird (or even a harpy, as Creed notes); she is seen as an animal that watches him from above and attacks without prior warning. She is literally above, as the Gothic Bates house looms over the motel, and metaphorically above, as she is dead and watching ‘from beyond the grave.’ The sex-death dichotomy returns with this bird metaphor, the Hitchcockian conflation of animals and sex\textsuperscript{147} is blatantly obvious. The physical space of the buildings also represent sex versus death – the looming house that watches over the motel seems to imply the (assumed) frigidity and austere nature of the dead Mrs. Bates, while the motel itself with its pay-per-hour persona reeks of lascivious potency that in many ways evokes Marion’s character. Death is the ‘final triumphant lover.’\textsuperscript{148}

The cellar, while seen as the metaphor for Mrs. Bates’ monstrous womb, also epitomizes all the female characters in the film. The three main women represent the most provocative stereotypes in culture – the whore (Marion), the virgin (Lila), and the old hag (Norma). It alludes to the sense that each female is literally concatenated into a singular entity, one that is not assimilable to the patriarchal culture, but projected into these three concepts – not one is the protagonist, how could they be? Audiences’ initial shock that Hitchcock has murdered the presumed ‘main’ protagonist were unwarranted. Psycho is all about Norman. His desires, his maternal projection, his psychosis. Rather, what the woman is ultimately represented by in the narrative is the cellar; she is the ‘blackness of extinction,’\textsuperscript{149} the ‘dark continent,’ the prevailing lack, the abject nothingness.

\textsuperscript{145} ibid., p. 1.
\textsuperscript{146} ibid., p. 12.
\textsuperscript{147} See for example, the birds in The Birds, and the horse in Marnie.
\textsuperscript{149} Creed, The Monstrous-Feminine, op. cit., p. 28.
The theatrical ‘reveal’ of Mrs. Bates in the scene cited above enhances the abject quality of the cavernous cellar scene. Lila’s hand slowly touches Mrs. Bates’ shoulder and the Psycho violin theme-tune begins to crescendo. The scene is further abjected by the ‘graceful, ballet-like’ movements of the corpse when it is rotated on its chair. She/it turns around, silently staring, yet uncannily without eyes. The make-up on the cadaver is also frivolously abject. It is a redundant yet laborious activity performed by Norman to enhance the ‘beauty’ of ‘Mother’, and can be seen developed into monstrous grotesque humour in later films such as Death Becomes Her (Robert Zemeckis, 1992). I do not need to expand too much on why the corpse of Mrs. Bates is abject, as it is the ultimate of abjection. A female corpse, liminal, laughing, foul and taboo, impure, polluting and ultimately disgusting. Not only is she all of these but she epitomizes the three main concepts of abjection mentioned previously. Firstly, food loathing is represented by our imagination via Mother’s monstrously misshapen and putrid breasts seeping with bile and chemicals rather than nutritious milk, the mere thought of it would sicken! In the second part, her corpse both defies and confirms death creating a liminality that pushes the boundaries of life, or as Kristeva notes:

The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us.150

Mrs. Bates’ corpse literally beckons to us; she sits there staring at us, laughing and mocking us with her grotesque ‘in-joke.’ In the final and ultimate form of abjection Norma’s maternal body itself recalls the pre-Symbolic that violently threatens subjectivity and subsequently threatens death with its enveloping presence. In the words of Kristeva, ‘devotees of the abject, she as well as he, do not cease looking, within what flows from the other’s “innermost being,” for the desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject inside of the maternal body.’151 Mrs. Bates’ smirk shows us what we will become… For ‘when the image laughs, identity crumbles…’152

150 Kristeva, Powers of Horror, op. cit., p. 4.
151 Ibid., p. 54.
Discussing the scene that started this chapter, Roger Dadoun notes that: ‘The most horrific moment of [Psycho], the scene that is the fantasmatic and emotional pivot of the whole story, is the one where the mother is everywhere, occupying the whole screen from one edge of the frame to another.’ This is the ultimate image, it is the moment that encapsulates all that has come before it, and defines the entire gamut of interpretations outlined in the three main concepts of the grotesque, the uncanny and the abject. Through these forms that present themselves in contemporary art, literature, cinema and all forms of the arts, this chapter has endeavoured to explore the ways in which theorists have attempted to define the varying manifestations of fear and horror. What they, or I, may not have done is capture it in its entirety, yet the point of these manifestations is that, like the term Gothic, they are ever-changing – through epochs, through centuries, through individual subjects themselves – yet, like using psychoanalysis as a faulty but functioning tool, what we do have via the analysis of these concepts and their authors use of language itself, is a framework to explore and decipher these emotions.

Do I incline towards a rigid, formulaic and definitive response to these three concepts (as I had intended to do before completing this chapter)? Is one the most important? Or is it that each concept – abjection, the uncanny, and the grotesque – are the result of a layered and intricate concatenation, all of which arouse, invoke and return to the female body as site and sight of the monstrous. The problem is that the representation of fear is not something that is tangible or expressible in language. Mrs. Bates is ‘the thing' that is most feared, ultimately by patriarchal, cultural and unconscious histories. A focus on the patriarchal culture is important here – does the feminine fear Mrs. Bates in the same way as the masculine does? This question will be analysed in further chapters.

I have attempted to discover Mrs. Bates in these three concepts, that I, either correctly or erroneously, split into three separate theoretical constructs, to try to give her a name. Yet no matter how you attempt to name her, she is our worst nightmare personified – sitting there, frighteningly present and absent at the same time, laughing and staring back at us. Perhaps she is frightening because she is unnameable, she is liminal. As Robin Wood notes, ‘the

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characters of Psycho are one character, and that character, thanks to the identifications the film evokes, is us."\textsuperscript{154} So let us revert to our sinister and shadowy psychic cellar and explore what we have lurking in its darkness.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{psycho_still.png}
\caption{Psycho film still, Alfred Hitchcock, 1960.}
\end{figure}

We dare not speak about shit. But, since the beginning of time, no other subject – not even sex – has caused us to speak so much.\textsuperscript{155}

In my early days at Art College, I studied as a printmaker, perhaps a far cry from video, but I feel it was an important step into the video installation practice that I am largely concerned with now. Printmaking provided me with the tools to create, and re-create repetitive (if slightly different) images, and it made me develop works that were physically, and through a movement into video, temporally, layered – repetition and imbrication subsequently became my primary mode of representation. Images that fascinated me in my undergraduate included uncanny depictions of adolescence, such as the work of Yoshitomo Nara, Loretta Lux, and Anna Gaskell, alongside images with extreme repetitiveness like Roni Horn’s You Are The Weather (Fig. 2). These images of young girls portrayed an innocence that I was searching for, but instead I unconsciously and unintentionally set about making work that dealt with fear. Having an anxious temperament, a very strict upbringing, and a slow awakening realisation of my homosexuality, I became fascinated by reading theories around psychoanalysis and how the mind works. It took several years, until the end of my undergraduate course, to realise it was my own strange and constant state of anxiety that I was trying, but failing, to illustrate in my artwork.

Imagery that depicted what I call the ‘horrific’ did not come into my practice until I read Harry M. Benshoff’s book *Monsters in the Closet* (1997), which situated horror in relation to alternative Queer sexuality, and explored how horror creates a space for the experience of otherness, whether that was class, race, gender or sexual orientation. Fascinated by this premise, I began to look at horror films in a new light. My work slowly began to take on images of horror, but it became decidedly about hysteria and issues of portraiture – I was questioning if the image of the body could represent pain, fear or anxiety. Reading about Jean-Martin Charcot and viewing images of his ‘hysteric’ women, I became interested in bodily movement – of somatic ‘disturbances’. My first ‘video’ from 2006, *Always Inside and Outside, I Am Constantly Divided by The Two Spheres of Your Space* (Fig. 3), explored the image of the feminine in relation to the traditional image of the hysteric. I compiled over 600 head-shots of a model shaking her body in a torturous process of making her shudder from side to side for as long as physically possible; her long ‘swooshing’ hair and the blur of the photograph rupturing parts of her pretty but agonised face. The
images created a photographic animation in which each frame was blended and fused with the previous and following image, creating a blurred and ghostly image that vied between orgastic sensuality and erupting monstrousness.

Fig. 3. Jenny Keane, Always Inside and Outside, I Am Constantly Divided by The Two Spheres of Your Space, 2006. Single channel video installation, 6:12 mins (looped), video still.

Joanna Lowry notes the connection between the photographic portrait and the hysterical representation of women in institutions by psychiatrists such as Charcot; it was an attempt to evidence hidden emotional states through the visual [photographic] image. Lowry cites Hugh Diamond, a superintendent for the Female Department of the Surrey Council Lunatic Asylum in the 1850s – his approach to photographing his patients was reasoned because he believed it to be objective, it offered a opportunity to catalogue psychopathology, and most importantly, it ‘offered the potential to reveal to patients themselves a representation of their own pathological state.’\(^\text{156}\) Thus the photographic image

not only could be used as a diagnostic tool, but it also gave the opportunity to produce a ‘moment of self-recognition that could be part of the cure.’ Through an analysis of the possibility of performativity, the potential inauthenticity of these images, Lowry believes that the photographic image, and subsequently video, has become the established mode to constitute ‘a particular type of cultural site for the production of the self.’ Through historical use in hysteria cases, lens-based media have to this day become a space for the inscription of identity, and a ‘confined, hybrid space within which identity is performed.’ Photography and video thus becomes a means to explore psychological states, ‘a space in which every gesture or expression is to be read as a symptom.’

The title for Always Inside... came from Luce Irigaray’s book Elemental Passions (1982), which, as I will discuss in Chapter Three, is an exploration of ‘feminine transcendency,’ and a female desire to speak and ‘be’ that cannot be attained in patriarchy. The issue of language came about in the work I was making at this time, and the sound in the Always Inside... video was created by layers of a whispered voice that would speed up as the images on screen became faster, the sound became a cacophonic crescendo which stopped suddenly as the image paused, and the sequence was then looped. The words whispered were themselves inconsequential; they were personal narratives, quotes from books and novels, and random babbling, but their point was to explore the challenges of language and image in a naïve endeavour to translate emotion from the inside to the outside.

Perhaps the video did not achieve what I had intended, but it led me to ask questions about what my practice was attempting to achieve. I wanted to investigate the nature of fear in all its manifestations, exploring the ‘symptoms’ that fear produces. Thus, taking Kristeva’s analysis of the semiotic and abjection as well as Bakhtin’s grotesque body into consideration, an exploration of language became the prime arena to do this. As Kristeva notes:

But is not exactly language our ultimate and inseparable fetish? And language, precisely, is based on fetishist denial (‘I know that, but just the same,’ “the sign is not the thing, but just the same,” etc.) and defines us in our essence as speaking beings. Because of its founding status, the fetishism of “language” is perhaps the only one that is unanalyzable.

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157 ibid., p. 97.
For Kristeva, through the process of loss of the semiotic and entry into the symbolic she concludes that ‘any practice of speech ... is a language of fear.'\(^{159}\) In my art practice, the mouth became the corporeal symbol for language and my subsequent work after Always Inside... has invariably dealt with the mouth as source of abjection, desire, language, and the liminality of the female body.

Finally coming to the task at hand, this Interim focuses on abjection in art, but rather than applaud the traditional perception, the Abject art of the 1990s, I wish to discuss my art practice to show that it does not fit into the conception of abjection in art commonly held during this period. Kristeva’s book *Powers of Horror*, which was discussed in the previous chapter, has a lot to answer for. Art that contains supposedly ‘abject’ objects, like urine, faeces, pus, semen, and blood have been deemed Abject art, as have performative works that deal with the body in relation to these waste products, or images that evoke disgust and horror. I propose that this Nineties formulation of Abject art does not fit within neither Kristeva’s psychoanalytical and literary theories, nor does it represent my artworks.

Katy Deepwell notes with regards to Abject art in terms of painting, that Kristeva’s theories have been:

...frequently evoked as an alibi to old modernist practices ...All too often psychoanalytical theory appears dragged in at the last minute, a theoretical adjunct to “reading” practice which continues in modernist modes as explorations of the body of “universal” woman. ...My criticism of this strategy is that it repeats the formula invested in the symbolic order without effecting any disruptions of the binary oppositions which structure this status quo.\(^{160}\)

Similar critiques of Abject art or abjection itself can be seen by many feminist theorists including Rosemary Betterton, Rosalind Krauss, Lynda Nead, Leslie Jones, and Janet Wolff, to name but a few. Their main premise indicates that the feminine represented as disgusting and monstrous merely reiterates the fear and disgust of the female body in the tradition of Western culture. To cite historical perceptions of this assumed position of the feminine, Marina Warner quotes the 10\(^{th}\) century Abbot Odo of Cluny, who writes: ‘The beauty of women

\(^{159}\) ibid., p. 38.
is only skin-deep. If men could only see what is beneath the flesh and penetrate below the surface with eyes like the Boeotian lynx, they would be nauseated just to look at women, for all this feminine charm is nothing but phlegm, blood, humours, gall."161 Is this what women are perceived as? It appears so, if we look at the mind/body binary inscribed by patriarchy – we are positioned as merely disgusting flesh and body, and nothing more.

Discussing Abject art in 1995, Hal Foster and Liz Kotz believe that some art practices had gone too far:

Foster: ...there’s still the problem of the politics of alterity, the avant-garde of transgression, the appropriation of otherness, whatever you want to call it. This politics vectors through all these different developments, so that first we have feminism, then postcolonial discourse, and now queer studies. This politics quickly exhausts each, consumes each, to the point where there’s now a fatigue (to bring up my own consumerist term) with the politics of difference tout court, to the point, even, where there’s now a celebration of indifference, of indistinction. Today this politics if alterity is pushed to the point of utter nilility, where the subject that is the most other, the furthest out, the one that some people identify with now is not even a subject anymore: it is the corpse.

Kotz: But that attraction I often find so weirdly oppressive, like the way the abject is being taken up now. I see this space offered to women artists as long as they fulfill the role of the abject and the dysfunctional. It’s a little disturbing that at this moment that kind of dysfunctionality is being imposed on women. I find it as confining as some previous rubric of empowerment and positive images and all that stuff: those are both very confining avenues if they’re imposed institutionally.162

This issue of abjection in women’s art could be seen as an imposition, and a cliché ‘representation of femininity itself.’ Female artists that have been placed in this box include Kiki Smith, Helen Chadwick, Cindy Sherman, Carolee Schneemann, Judy Chicago, and many more. In the most cited display of Abject art, the 1993 Whitney biennial, the curators defined Abject art in terms of bodily and decaying matter, as ‘work which incorporates or suggests abject materials such as dirt, hair, excrement, dead animals, menstrual blood, and rotting food in order to confront taboo issues of gender and sexuality.’163

Laura Mulvey, in her discussion of Cindy Sherman’s work, positions Sherman as ‘bring[ing] back a politics of the body that had been lost or neglected in … 70s feminism.’ Through a chronological approach to Sherman’s works, Mulvey proposes ‘a strange process of metamorphosis’ took place in Sherman’s practice. Developing from her *Untitled Film Stills* (Fig. 4) of 1977, which depicted pseudo-cinematic images, Sherman’s work became more grotesque, culminating in the series *Untitled* from 1985-87 (or the ‘Disgust’ series, Fig. 5) that removed the physicality of the body into the disintegrated ‘mess’ of congealed prosthetics, blood, slime, food and hair. Simultaneously, contrasting the *Untitled Film Stills*, the ‘surrounding mise-en-scenes had gradually vanished as though Sherman was denying the viewer any distraction or mitigation from the figures themselves, as they gradually became more and more grotesque.’ Mulvey believes that it is this chronological process in Sherman’s work that provides a representation of abjection. It is the gradual subversion of fetish that Mulvey

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164 Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity*, op. cit., p. 66.
165 ibid., p. 71.
sees in the images; the ‘unveiling’ of what the fetishist disavows – the castrated female. Mulvey writes that ‘she “unveils” the use of the female body as a metaphor of division between the surface allure and concealed decay, as though the stuff that has been projected for so long into a mythic space “behind” the mask of femininity had suddenly broken through the delicately painted veil.’

Rosemary Betterton analyses Mulvey’s belief that Sherman’s use of the grotesque ‘not to elude the objectifying gaze, as to expose its profoundly fetishistic structure,’ may not ‘reveal the iconography of misogyny’ at all. She asks: ‘But do [Sherman’s] photographs, as Mulvey suggests, “unveil” the use of the female body as a metaphor for division between surface allure and concealed decay – or do they merely reproduce it?’

Betterton, while denying the monstrous feminine in artworks like Sherman’s because the imagery still reveals the ‘misogyny of the culture and its deep hostility to the

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166 ibid., p. 72.
female and maternal body,\textsuperscript{168} believes that the abjection in orality and imagery of food, as opposed to the representation of the body, could be a site to explore abjection. It is this separation that reconstitutes abjection to ‘a woman’s point of view.’ (I will discuss this point in more detail in Chapter Three.) She provides a compelling case, citing Helen Chadwick and Nicoletta Comand, but can one separate abjection into this specific and singular element? Because abjection, or its relation to femininity, is not merely about food, I believe that you cannot.

In a similar sense, Rosalind Krauss speaks about Sherman’s relation to abjection as repositioning the female in relation to the wound of castration, but unlike Mulvey, she sees it as reductive. It is a ‘childish’ move, which becomes ‘merely a way to characterise bodily substances so that the formerly disprivileged becomes the privileged.’\textsuperscript{169} What stands out as completely incorrect in Krauss’ analysis of abjection is that Kristeva does not ever discuss the female body as site of the wound of castration or fetishism (actually, except for the above quote which talks about language as fetish as opposed to castration complex, she does not use the word ‘fetish’ in Powers of Horror at all), rather she speaks of the chora (the womb) of the devouring mother as a return to the semiotic – this, and only this, is what produces abjection. While I am interested in how the wound of castration links to the abject, using Kristeva would be unwise. It is Barbara Creed, however, who positions the fetish in terms of abjection, and has pinpointed the relationships between the fetish and abjection in horror films, which has feminist film theory (an area of theory decidedly based on fetishism) at its core. As Creed notes in contrast to her research, Kristeva’s position is an exploration of the archaic mother of the pre-Oedipal: ‘The womb is not the site of castration anxiety. … For the concept of the archaic mother allows for a notion of the feminine which does not depend for its definition on a concept of the masculine.’\textsuperscript{170} Thus Krauss denounces abjection in art on the premise of its supposed connection to fetishism seemingly without even reading Kristeva! She instead proposes Bataille’s informe\textsuperscript{171} as a way to discuss art that incites disgust. Yet Winfried Menninghaus

\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., p. 138.
\textsuperscript{170} Creed, The Monstrous-Feminine, op. cit., p. 28.
\textsuperscript{171} As Kerstin Mey notes, ‘While the abject is connected with certain states of physical being and materials that provoke repulsion and shock, the formless points to the level of representation, the
perceives that Bataille’s concept of the antiaesthetic is rooted in ‘an affirmation of rude masculine sadism.’\textsuperscript{172} How can Krauss defend this very masculine term while denying the importance of Kristeva’s non-masculine abjection?

Through these analyses, it makes it very clear that many theorists who either agree with Abject art or denounce it, and in fact some of the artists who proclaim to work with it, do not have enough basic knowledge of Kristevian abject theory to make a concrete informed decision on either side of the argument (I believe, and would hope, that I am not one of them). I wish to take a look at abjection again to understand its relation to art practices.

If, as I pointed out in Chapter One, the uncanny and the grotesque are based on a patriarchal fear of the feminine, then so is the abject. Kristeva’s theoretical works are explicitly not feminist, but she has never claimed to be. Yet there is such a backlash about this that feminist theorists have renounced her theoretical practice simply on the basis that she cannot agree with feminism (for example, Jennifer Stone in her essay \textit{The Horrors of Power}), although she does acknowledge the fact that she is a woman as being central to her practice: ‘It was necessary perhaps to be a woman to attempt to take up that exorbitant wager of carrying the rational project to the outer borders of the signifying ventures of men.’\textsuperscript{173} Jacqueline Rose sees Kristeva with underlying feminist urges, as Kristeva is ‘echoing a longstanding feminist demand that [motherhood] should be allowed a voice in constructing the priorities of the political domain.’\textsuperscript{174} But at the same time, which Rose vehemently disagrees with, Kristeva believes that feminism is ‘a monolithic entity which, in its claim for identity and power (identity as power), repeats and reinforces the rigidity of the culture which produced it.’\textsuperscript{175} Yet Rose would not deny her importance due to the fact that she opens up questions and issues that arise through the development of her multivalent writings; because her analysis is as unstable as
the very issues she explores, she is ‘poised on that interface of politics/psychoanalysis/feminism.’

Hal Foster investigates the analysis of Abject art with the most clarity, he explores the issue of Kristeva’s term in its vacillating ambiguity and questions if abjection can actually be represented in art at all. As he notes, Kristeva’s conception of abjection can be presented in two ways, to be abject and to abject (something). The latter defines a cultural (re)ordering and positions the subject back into the symbolic, as Foster calls it ‘the operation of abjection’, but the former concept is more challenging. This is ‘the condition of abjection’ and it subverts both subjectivity and society. Foster asks: ‘Can the condition of abjection be mimed in a way that calls out, in order to disturb, the operation of abjection?’

Analogous to my proposition that practices of Abject art are theoretically incorrect, Foster believes that the strategies of these artworks were very problematic, and he tries to examine what Abject art was actually doing. He believes the works were attempting one of two different approaches: the first was identifying with the abject and the second was to represent the condition of abjection to provoke the operation. Yet these were based in mimesis and merely confirmed the abjection already in place – it returned to abjecting the work itself. These two forms relied on either ‘Oedipal naughtiness or infantile perversion,’ and Foster believes it sets up a binary: ‘To act dirty with the secret wish to be spanked [by the law of the Father=society], or to wallow in shit with the secret faith that the most defiled might reverse into the most sacred.’

If neither of these attempts to rupture the symbolic worked, how can artists explore abjection? Foster proposes an ambivalent liminality – ‘the goal … is not to break with the symbolic order absolutely, but to expose it in crisis, to register its points not only of breakdown but of breakthrough.’

Winfried Menninghaus has captured what the abject in art can and should achieve. In his analysis in the book Disgust, he believes the Abject art of the Nineties, based on its maximum impact of disgust, actually ‘passes into utter indifference’ in its representation of abject ‘objects’ – it is only the vying between disgust, beauty, and desire in the female body that can capture the

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176 ibid., p. 143.
178 ibid., p. 118.
179 ibid.
180 ibid., p. 115.
181 Menninghaus, Disgust, op. cit., p. 401.
powers of horror/abjection in art. In a similar sense, my proposition is that abjection is the in-betweenness of borders; it is the shifting boundaries of the body itself that make abjection so powerful, not the part-objects like piss and shit. The abject is ‘neither subject or object,’ so to create abjection in the art object is impossible. These objects are excluded and abjected but they are not abject. In art, these objects do not represent abjection, for faeces can only become reminders of abjection for the subject, not the audience; once removed from another’s body, they merely reiterate the other’s otherness: as Kristeva notes on the first page (1) of Powers of Horror, ‘the abject is not an object facing me, which I name or imagine.’ In attempting to create something ‘abject’, the actual process of doing so makes it impossible to actually be abject – so the disgusting objects used in some Abject art of the Nineties provided just that, disgusting objects. Only the body itself can become abject – as I suggested in Chapter one, it is the dead mother personified by Mrs. Bates in Psycho, captured as if alive by the swinging light bulb. It is not her corpse alone that is abject, for the corpse is a subject transformed into object, it is the corpse’s allusion to life that makes her so frightening because she is liminal. Being engulfed by the mother epitomises the state of being abject – the death of subjectivity while being very much alive.

I wish to return to Mulvey’s analysis of Cindy Sherman’s work in terms of how the abject could be represented in art. Perhaps Mulvey’s suggestion surrounding Sherman’s chronology could provide a key to how art practices could move away from the trite and vapid representations of ‘abjection’ defined the Nineties. If Sherman could capture all those ten years of imagery into a single photograph or perhaps a video (in its own peculiar allusion to life), which vacillates from the strange and uncanny power of the Untitled Films Stills to the visceral and appalling Untitled (1985-87) ‘Disgust’ series, then her work might challenge the binaries, confronting the issues of representing femininity and subsequently truly represent abjection.

On the suggestion of Sherman using video, I wish to return to my practice to explore my relation to abjection. Video can achieve the movement between life and death – the liminality between presence and absence, movement and stasis that can emphasise abjection’s allusion to death in life and vice versa.

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Laura Mulvey notes this in her book *24 x a Second*, which I will discuss in further chapters.

As I examined above with regards to *Always Inside...*, my work considers the construct of language. Throughout all my work, I deal with an inability and fear of speaking, perhaps based on anxiety and a childhood stammer, but also exploring the issue surrounding language in feminist theory. In her book *The Feminist Critique of Language: A Reader* (1998), Deborah Cameron notes:

Language, for women, is not good enough. ... [Feminism explores] ideas of women’s dissatisfaction with language as an expressive medium: the quest for new images and ways of writing which represent women’s bodies and lives as conventional language allegedly cannot. All this implies a negative assessment of existing linguistic practice, a critical approach to the way language has been, and still is, used.\(^\text{183}\)

In this sense, all my work explores this issue in varying ways. Other works that dealt with language in my earlier practice included *Breath* (2008), which is discussed in Interim Three, *Black and Purple* (2008), which I talk about in Interim Two, and *Ingeminated Battology* (Fig. 6.) which I will look at here.

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**Fig. 6.** Jenny Keane, *Ingeminated Battology*, 2008. Double channel video installation, 8:28 mins (looped), video still.

*Ingeminated Battology* is a double channel video installation. The two flat-screens work together, and the image creates an illusion of a full mouth, although, in reality, the individual screens show the mirror image of each other. At different times, the two images slowly move in and out of sequence. Each moment on screen is specifically choreographed to create a sense of constant jarring that comes together in climactic harmony, and then loses its momentum.

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again. The close up of the mouth opens and closes, sucks, licks, and attempts to create words, eventually showing a black tongue, mouth and partially black teeth, alluding to melancholia. The tongue is a liminal object – inside and outside, soft and hard. It deals with food, language and sexuality. In this work, I am interested in the subversion of all three.

Installed in a small black room, generally no larger than 5m x 5m, there is a very close proximity to the images on the large screens. The floor of the room is covered in a thick and rich red carpet that creates a tactile feeling underfoot and echoes the red lips in the video – this connection between image and space creates an immersive environment that positions the audience almost within the mouth of/in the video. Exploring double channel video installations will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Three, and the blackness that alludes to the melancholic humor will be also be spoken about in further chapters. What I wish to pinpoint in this Interim is the relationship to abjection that this piece attempts to create.

Fig. 7. Jenny Keane, Ingeminated Battology, 2008. Installation shot, University of Ulster, Belfast, 2008.
The mouth connects, as I discussed in Chapter One, to the grotesque body alluding to the entrance of the vagina; this oral cavity evokes the frightening maternal mouth threatening to engulf subjectivity, bordering on the ‘abyss of the female organ from which all life comes forth’ to quote Lacan. The mouth moves but it cannot speak or be heard, and it returns the female body from its repression in the symbolic, to the chora of indifferenciation: ‘If language, like culture, sets up a separation and, starting with discrete elements, concatenates an order, it does so precisely by repressing maternal authority and the corporeal mapping that abuts against them.’ The video, and its immersive installation, harks a return to the state of the pre-Symbolic, and becomes both threatening and thrilling.

The movement of the mouth in the sequences between the two screens questions ideas around repetition, copying, re-enactment, and difference. In his book, The Culture of the Copy (2000), Hillel Schwartz talks about the fascination with citation, as ‘states of obsessive, sometimes fatal repetition.’ And, as such, the title, Ingeminated Battology literally means ‘pointlessly repeating the same thing (word) over and over again’. Yet is not repetition per se, through the two screens, the installation is focussed on the concept of the double – Freud’s most frightening doppelgänger. Kristeva believes that the concept of the double alludes to the frightening devouring maternal figure, as ‘both source of life and the abyss’:

(Re)duplication is blocked repetition. Whereas repetition extends in time, reduplication is outside of time, a reverberation in space, a game of mirrors with no perspective, no duration. For a while, a double can freeze the instability of the same, give it temporary identity, but eventually it explores the abyss of the same, probing those unsuspected and unplumbable depths. The double is the unconscious depth of the same, that which threatens it, can engulf it.

But the maternal for Kristeva is not just a passive state; it also creates a ‘law before the Law,’ a time of learning about the body, a space that is dependant on meaning but ‘in a way that is not that of linguistic signs nor of the symbolic

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Kristeva, Powers of Horror, op. cit., p. 72.
order they found’\(^{189}\) – it is this ‘primal mapping’ between the mother and child that can be seen in the screens in *Ingeminated Battology* as each channel takes turns to move and copy the other, a learning in and through the body. This time is ‘confronted with states of distress that are evoked for us by the child who makes himself heard but is incapable of making himself understood, we, adults, use the word “fear.”’\(^{190}\) This links to the process of portraiture, as Joanna Lowry notes, ‘the subject, whether posing for a photographic portrait, or performing on the screen, is invariably on the brink of dissolution, is always potentially hysterical.’\(^{191}\) It is this borderline of fear that I attempt to recreate and analyse.

Finally, I wish to quickly round up the elements of the video that I feel are different to Abject art practices, and I will note the differences that I will examine in my practice and the practices of other recent female video artists in the rest of this thesis, to propose that ultimately the work evokes a peculiar liminality that vies between polarities – much like abjection itself. *Ingeminated Battology*, unlike the work of Sherman, does evoke the site of the female body as monstrous and abject but at the same time it becomes sexual and inviting, which presents the vacillation between desire and disgust. The movements of the mouth are rhythmic bodily gestures that again suggest the relationship between the maternal and childish in the *chora*, but simultaneously evoke the Freudian Death Drive (which will be discussed further in other chapters). Like Kristeva, the video deals with the construction of language and its breakdown, alongside the connection between repetition and the double. Through this doubling, the video itself provides a self-reflexive repeated performative experience, which is, as Joanna Lowry notes, a space of liminality between reality and illusion, subjectivity and dissolution:

> The video recording of a performance … became a vehicle of the construction of a discursive space that sought to link concepts of authenticity (registered by the recording itself) and performativity, the space of performance being established as one in which the self might be effectively dismantled.\(^{192}\)

Through this process there is an immersiveness that provokes the audience’s fascination, which is reiterated in and through the installation, but it does not

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\(^{190}\) Ibid., p. 33.


\(^{192}\) Ibid., p. 98.
depend on the spectacle of the cinematic as the images are repeated and looped through the distantiating double channel. Unlike Abject art, the video does not rely entirely on images of disgust either – the video installation provides a comforting maternal environment that evokes both the peacefully positive and nauseating negative of the pre-Symbolic.

Ultimately the process of video becomes a format to explore the concept of abjection in its fundamentally liminal state. While I have only briefly suggested what Ingeminated Battology attempts, I will return to these issues in the next chapters. It is my proposition in this thesis that the process of video, and more particularly video installation, can provide a way to examine and interpret abjection and horror in an environment that does not allow the spectacle of horror, or the spectacle of film, to return to the female body as the negative in the phallocentric binary but rather, provides alternative spaces to work within – and between.
ENTRÉE REGAN’S BEDROOM. DAY.

Chris bursts in, then stands rooted in shock, as we hear the sound of the bed shaking violently, and the continuation of dialogue between Regan and thundering deep Male Voice.

REGAN
(off-screen)
Please! Oh, please don’t —!

MALE VOICE
(off-screen)
You’ll do as I tell you, filth! You’ll —!

Chris has turned her head to stare at:

POV: On Karl. Blood trickling down from his forehead, he lies unconscious on the floor near the bureau. The camera goes to the bed disclosing Regan sitting up in a side view to the camera, her legs propped wide apart and the bone-white crucifix clutched in raw-knuckled hands that are upraised over her head. She seems to be exerting a powerful effort to keep the crucifix up, away from her vagina, which we cannot (and will not) see, her nightgown pulled up to precisely that point. We see that her face alters expression to match each voice in the argument, both of which are coming from her! When the deep Male Voice speaks through her mouth, the features instantaneously contort into a demonic grimace of malevolence and rage. Blood trickles down from Regan’s nose. The naso-gastric tubing has been ripped out. During the above:

REGAN
Oh, no don’t make me! Don’t!

REGAN/DEMON
You’ll do it!

REGAN
No! No —!

REGAN/DEMON
Do it, stinking bitch! You’ll do it! You’ll do it or I’m going to kill you!

REGAN
Nooooo!

REGAN/DEMON
Yes, do it, do it do —!
QUICK CUT TO:
Close down angle on Regan showing nothing from the waist down as with eyes wide and staring she seems to be flinching from the rush of some hideous finality, her mouth agape and shrieking in terror as she stares up at the upheld crucifix. Then the shriek ends as the demonic face one again takes over her features, and the piercing cry of terror elides into a yelping, guttural laugh of malevolent spite and rage triumphant as the crucifix is plunged down and out of sight at Regan’s vagina. The demonic face looks down, and we hear Regan/Demon roaring in that course deafening voice as the crucifix is repeatedly brought up and plunged down again, blood now spotting it as:

REGAN/DEMON
Yes, now you’re mine, you stinking cow! You’re mine, you’re mine, you’re -!

Chris has raced in, screaming, grappling to take hold of the crucifix. We see blood on Regan’s thighs, but never the vagina. The Demon first turns on Chris with a look of mind-bending fury. Then:

REGAN/DEMON
Ahh, little pig-mother!

The Demon pulls Chris’s head down, rubbing her face sensually against the pelvic area, then lifts her head and smashes Chris a blow across the chest that sends her reeling across the room and crashing to a wall with stunning force while Demon laughs with bellowing spite. Chris crumples against the wall near Karl. Chris begins to pick herself up. She stares towards the bed; her face bloodied, and begins to crawl painfully toward it.

REGAN/DEMON
Ah, there’s my pearl, my sweet honey piglet!

Chris’s POV: Moving shot on bed as she crawls closer. Regan now has her back to the camera, looking down, and we know the crucifix is being used for masturbation.

REGAN/DEMON
Ah! Yes, mine, you are mine, you are -!

It breaks off and Regan/demon abruptly looks over her shoulder at camera (and Chris), which halts at sight. The features of Regan’s face seems to be those of Burke Dennings. Then it speaks in the British-accented giggly voice of the dead director.

REGAN/DENNINGS
Do you know what she did, your cunting daughter?

Close on Chris screaming in horror. 193

THE EXORCIST

The film *The Exorcist* was released in 1973. Written by William Peter Blatty and directed by William Friedkin, *The Exorcist* has become one of the most, if not the most, famous horror films of all time. The plot focuses on the possession of a young girl by an evil demon (or demons, as the possessed voice uses pluralized pronouns), yet its cultural context implies that not only is it a sermon on good versus evil, but that it is also an examination of sexuality, religious decline and moral deterioration. For example, the main protagonist, Regan MacNeil, lives with her actress mother Chris, who employs a nanny to look after her daughter Regan because she spends much of her time working, and has divorced or separated from Regan’s father – such supposedly ‘sacrilegious’ activities almost justify the impending events. The film opens in a desert in Iraq where a man, who we later understand is the eponymous exorcist Father Merrin, is working on an archaeological dig and discovers the statue of the (fictional) demon Pazuzu. The scene changes to another priest’s breakdown of faith as he sees his mother dying of a terminal illness. This man, named Father Karras, both psychoanalyst and priest, attends to the main character, Regan, as her ‘possession’ is assessed by doctors and believed to be psychological. Regan’s supposedly psychosomatic symptoms include urinating in public, unusual strength and physical violence towards others, a masculine voice, bad language, speaking in tongues, vomiting green bile, and extreme bodily movements. The two most striking scenes involve her body; the first, which is cited above, involves a bloody crucifix and alludes to Regan masturbating with this ‘holiest of holy’ catholic symbols. The second scene is probably more famous due to its overt visual imagery unlike the masturbation scene, and it involves Regan tied to her bed, vomiting ‘pea soup’ (green bile) and twisting her head in a complete 360-degree turn. Especially in *The Exorcist*, as I will discuss later, the body is the sight and site of absolute abjection in horror films.

The plot continues as Father Karras records Regan’s voice and discovers that her inarticulable gibberish is actually reversed English, and she also speaks to him in Latin and other foreign languages which she could not possibly have known. Starting to consider that this possession is not merely psychological, Karras brings her case to the attention of the church whereby they employ the first character of the film, the infamous exorcist/archaeologist Father Merrin. Merrin and Karras enter Regan’s room and begin their exorcism incantations but Regan laughs and channels Karass’ mother’s voice, telling him he was a
bad son. Obviously upset, Karras is asked to leave while Merrin performs the rest of the rite. Things don’t go to plan – Merrin dies of a presumed heart attack and Karras’ only option is to invoke the demon and force it into his own body. Karras jumps from the bedroom window, killing himself thereby destroying the demon. The closing scene of the film involves a third priest, Father Dyer, walking away from the body of Karras to the now famous sound of Mike Oldfield’s song Tubular Bells.

While I use the metaphor of the kitchen in this chapter, and it is decidedly connected to the artworks that I will be discussing, The Exorcist is largely devoid of kitchen imagery. Unlike Chapter One, in which the cellar becomes the site of horror in the film, the spatial metaphor for the chapter, and the experiential space in which the theoretical concepts lie – in some sense, the lack of a kitchen attests to what is familially awry in The Exorcist. The mother, Chris (even in her name she is masculinized), does not care to spend any time in the kitchen; the family is represented as a broken home, with a mother who is too busy with her career to care for her child, and as I shall discuss, this denial of her ‘role in the kitchen’ causes the subsequent monstrous events.

**Early Video Art**

At the time that The Exorcist was being shown in cinemas, women artists had become actively engaged with the issues of feminism in both art and culture. Women were under-represented in all corners of society, and in the late 1960s a new second-wave of feminism emerged; through the analysis of patriarchal and phallic structures in politics and culture, women tried to establish equal opportunities and rights. The slogan ‘the personal is political,’ coined by activist Carol Hanisch, was at the forefront of the campaign to bring down the prevailing sexist power structures. This movement towards discussions of the family home, the confinement of the domestic, became a powerful metaphor for the (societal) status quo, as Sally Potter notes: ‘Ideology is not merely reflected but produced in the context of the family and in personal relationships… political structures are not just “out there” but are manifest in the most seemingly insignificant actions, words and conditions.’

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patriarchy had ‘infiltrated, indeed created, the private realm, a bounded territory where the majority of women lived out their lives.’ Within its diegesis, *The Exorcist* exemplifies how patriarchal culture attempted to subliminally coerce women back to their domestic roles, literally inferring that ‘all hell could break loose’ if women were to leave the kitchen. With these ideas in mind, women artists began to deal with this restrictive space of the feminine, and issues surrounding the lack of female representation in art history became a fiery debate, in part, stemming from writers such as Linda Nochlin and her infamous essay, *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?* (1971). In art, men traditionally created the images of women as either objects of desire, or as Catherine Elwes notes, objects of disgust: ‘This system of classification was complimented by the virgin-whore dichotomy with the sexually voracious woman opposed to the ubiquitous image of maternal and domestic devotion on which society turned and reproduced.’ How could the work of women artists not recreate these gender stereotypes?

In the 1970s, the answer came from two of the very new forms of contemporary art, performance and video. By utilizing a new medium that had not been previously ‘controlled by men’ unlike traditional forms like painting, women could explore how to represent their previously subjugated identities. Catherine Elwes discusses that ‘for women developing a new taxonomy of feminine subjectivity, a nascent video language, unburdened by centuries of patriarchal precedents, seemed to offer relatively virgin territory for the exploration of the feminine.’ The two art forms of video and performance had no histories of ‘excluding women’. The relationship between performance and video, a style commonly known as performance-to-camera, became a medium whereby women could explore a political and personal identity and redefine the phallocentric representation of femininity. Furthermore, the political activism put forward by feminism could be video’d and disseminated rapidly through the use of the new Sony PortaPak video camera and video play-back; it was copied and sent nationally and internationally. Excluded by male-dominated television, and fetishized in the cinema, the medium of video provided women with the power to be on screen – on their own terms. Feminists saw this as an opportunity to get their work out there, to articulate their feelings and create work with immediacy, which dealt with the issues that surrounded

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196 Ibid., p. 39.
197 Ibid., p. 41.
feminism at the time, including language, gender roles, domesticity, motherhood, and the body. While women had previously been designated the role of the ‘model’ as opposed to ‘artist’, women began to use video and performance to explore this problem, and to subvert it.

**Martha Rosler**

The ‘feminist in the kitchen,’ to use Charlotte Brundson’s term, is an oxymoron. The feminist should deny the ‘shackles’ of patriarchy by not allowing herself to be embroiled in the sexual division of labour, particularly cooking and cleaning – repetitive tasks with no respect or monetary value. Yet the imagery of femininity on television in the 1960s and 70s was specifically directed towards a return to the kitchen. After the Second World War, women who had previously been given jobs and duties outside the home because of a lack in ‘man-power,’ were ousted from their employment so that the returning soldiers could be restored to their ‘rightful’ places – the breadwinners. As well as subliminal films like *The Exorcist*, a focus via magazine and television advertising, soap-operas, and TV chefs promoted the tidy, happy home; included was a ‘domestic goddess’ who should be waiting with a dinner for the hard-working man’s return home.

Martha Rosler’s famous video *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975, Fig. 8) is a parody of the roles that women were perceived to have in society, and subverts the stereotypical television cooking show host, a role that firmly places the woman in the kitchen. Rosler’s practice, as Jane Wark notes, deals with the fact that: ‘The forces of domination and oppression played out within the privacy of home and family are inseparable from our more conventional understanding of their impact in the public sphere.’

Simultaneously, the issue of television production is explored in the work, and the piece attempts to challenge the typical male (middle-class, white, heterosexual) producers of TV programmes. The undeviating stare towards the camera denotes a presenter or official news reporter, and as Elwes notes, this ‘manufactured intimacy of this direct address to an audience was a useful precedent.’

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199 Elwes, *Video Art*, op. cit., p. 41.
began to reconstruct a language of the imagination, a skewed vision of the world that slid between the cracks and fissures of what is known."

Fig. 8. Martha Rosler, *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, 1975. Single channel video, black & white, 6:12 mins, video still.

The representations of domestic space have a connection to theories surrounding the analysis of horror, as Paul Wells discusses about the relationship between feminism and the horror genre: ‘[In the horror film] the family has been perceived as increasingly dysfunctional; the locus for incest, abuse, and other Oedipal angst. Indeed, the domestic space had become the locality for the worst of horror.’ Wells continues by saying that the horror text, like the character of Chris in *The Exorcist*, continually addresses ‘the dysfunctional and antithetical aspects of the romantic and the domestic, collapsing all received notions of predictable gender identities and social formations.’ Similarly, in *Semiotics of the Kitchen* Rosler explores the domestic space through aspects of seemingly incongruous feminine violence and horror. As the video begins, the camera pans out from a chalkboard inscribed with the title of the piece. It focuses on a small kitchen filled with cookbooks, cooker, fridge, and small table.

200 ibid., p. 91.
202 ibid.
laden with cooking implements. Rosler is in the centre of the shot and proceeds to put on a large apron, shouting ‘Apron’ as she does do. The next item she picks up is a bowl, she says ‘Bowl’, and mimes (in a languid or monotonous way, which evokes boring, repetitious activities) the action of stirring to explain its function. The next object is a ‘Chopper’, and she proceeds to slam the chopper into the bowl with a violent series of loud bangs. These disturbing and vicious actions continue alphabetically to the letter ‘Z’. The use of the alphabet is reminiscent of analytical studies of the relationship between femininity and language, as I will discuss later, and it evokes a childish learning, an allusion to the mother’s help in the development from Kristeva’s semiotic into the symbolic order. After ‘Chopper’ we hear ‘Dish’, ‘Eggbeater’, and ‘Fork’, which she brandishes, wildly stabbing the fork into space with a maniacal action. Continuing along the alphabet, the movements become more fierce and violent; when she arrives at ‘Knife’ her stabbing gestures would not be out of place in a horror or slasher movie...

The rarely discussed issue of female violence is powerfully evoked in *Semiotics of the Kitchen*; it alludes to the erroneous belief that because of their caring nature women could not be aggressive. Violence by women is not tolerated; in society, law and the media proven feminine violence is so radically transgressive that it is sensationalized and deemed explicitly monstrous. The title given to transgressive women, *monster*, can be seen in the cases of female murderers, such as Myra Hindley, Rosemary West, and epitomised in the media’s portrayal of American serial killer Aileen Wuornos.  

Her story was bought by Hollywood and made into a film, actually entitled *Monster* (Patty Jenkins, 2003). While the real-life case of Wuornos is obviously more extreme than Rosler’s pseudo-murderous actions in the video, there seems to be a continual reiteration of the definition of a woman that defies convention, ergo monstrous. Through her actions, whether she is sexual, vain and immodest, or murderous, the female is placed into the role of the frightening monster. Barbara Creed in her seminal study on femininity in the horror film, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, defines her use of the term monstrous-feminine to

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203 Aileen Wuornos was an American serial killer who, on separate occasions between 1989 and 1990, murdered seven men after she believed they raped or attempted to rape her. As she was working as a prostitute, her self-defence plea was ignored, and she was given six life sentences (the seventh body was never found). While many people who worked with her, including psychiatrists, believed her to be mentally ill, through a competency evaluation she was deemed fit to be aware of why she received the death penalty and was executed by lethal injection in 2002.
explicate that the female monster is altogether different from the male monster; the innate dichotomous quality of the violent feminine denotes something that is decidedly more frightening than a male murderer: ‘As with all other stereotypes of the feminine, from virgin to whore, she is defined in terms of her sexuality. The phrase ‘monstrous-feminine’ emphasises the importance of gender in the construction of her monstrosity.’

But what is a monster? Etymologically it can be see as something that could be a caution, stemming from the Latin monere – to warn, or it could come from monstrare – to show, to demonstrate. But what is it showing us, what is it warning us about? In Rosler’s case the monstrous is doing both; the violent female is issuing a threat, showing that the position of patriarchy will be challenged. Through her sexuality, the monster-as-woman is an uncanny liminal creature, both frighteningly other and familiar at the same time.

This recurring and incessant monstrous-female action in *Semiotics of the Kitchen* could, as Catherine Elwes writes, be seen as ‘[t]he underlying threat of Freudian castration, of losing both the symbol and member of manhood, [it] is grimly laboured as Rosler hacks out the inventory of women’s repetitive domestic slavery saving up her anger in carefully measured culinary gestures.’ As I mentioned in Chapter One, the castration complex is the crux of Freudian psychoanalysis – the danger of losing the male’s penis. And in *Semiotics of the Kitchen* this becomes a very real threat, as phallocentric structures are held together by this anxiety. The phallus is power. Creed believes that this issue has defined the structures of female monstrosity, for ‘the concept of the monstrous-feminine, as constructed within/by patriarchal and phallocentric ideology, is related intimately to the problem of sexual difference and castration.’

Perhaps Rosler’s hacking of the air is an attempt to metaphorically hack off the phallic structures of patriarchy!

In the video, the camera is largely static until Rosler completes her kitchen alphabet with ‘U’, ‘V’, ‘W’, ‘X’, ‘Y’, and ‘Z’. The camera pans out so her whole body is seen in the shot, and these letters, instead of displaying objects, become actions she completes with her body – a body that is both excluded and fetishized in patriarchy. The letter ‘Y’ resembles a crucified Christ-like figure.

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204 Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, op. cit., p. 3.
206 Elwes, *Video Art*, op. cit., p. 42.

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and ‘Z’ becomes an ironic, yet still violent, reference to the mark of Zorro. Rosler’s expression is completely deadpan throughout the video, until the final moment where she folds her arms, looks directly at the camera and shrugs. The shrug seemingly becomes a defence or a denial, an exasperated sigh about the state of the situation, an *inarticulable* frustration with the expected actions of the female in the domestic role. Yet within the ‘domestic goddess’ lies the powerful threat of feminine monstrosity.

**Suzanne Lacy**

Perhaps horror, in terms of what is seen in films, may not have been the main conceptual focus of Rosler’s *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, but its allusions are very present and powerful. The same *unintentional* references cannot be said about Suzanne Lacy’s video *Learn Where the Meat Comes From* (1976) – while similar to Rosler, Lacy’s video vehemently takes on the imagery of horror. Exploring the connection between monstrosity, language and the feminine, Lacy ‘bridges the abyss of the language of violence and gender relations not through literal violence [like Rosler] but through an aggressive breakdown of language.’

Lacy’s piece, made one year after Rosler’s, is analogous by its setting: the video is a cooking lesson, overtly parodying American chef Julia Child’s television shows. Child’s unusual, (perhaps not intentionally) funny, and inviting programmes were offset by her slightly disturbing voice, which wavered between high and low in a neither feminine nor masculine tone. In *Learn Where the Meat Comes From*, Lacy’s voice, like Julia Child’s, is the most striking element. At the beginning of the video Lacy speaks about the language of butchers, coherently explaining each cut of meat on a lamb carcass, (an intentional allusion to the Lamb of God) by placing it on her own body. In doing so, she is seemingly discussing the objectification of the female body, literally showing the woman as a ‘piece of meat.’ As she speaks to the camera, Lacy’s narrative further parodies the role of the female cook:

> Innumerable housewives buy lamb year after year, often spending hundreds of dollars... Taking the time to learn where the meat comes from will ensure your constant success... If you’re willing to make

yourself utterly ridiculous, you can learn the different cuts in just few minutes.  

Fig. 9. Suzanne Lacy, Learn Where the Meat Comes From, 1976. Single channel video, colour, 14:00 mins, video still.

Ridiculous? Is Lacy insinuating that the whole concept of making the female synonymous with domesticity is ridiculous? It seems so, because as the process of explaining the different cuts of meat continues, Lacy’s ability to articulate words disintegrates and she slowly begins to lose the use of her mouth – she begins slurring, growling and baring her incisors like an animal. At a certain stage in the video, Lacy places false teeth, with vampiric large extended ‘canines’, in her mouth. The long incisor teeth (which represents ‘monster’) are presented here as ‘a particularly insidious form of the many mirrors that patriarchal structures of seeing hold up to the woman’. Also, while the work, like Martha Rosler’s, explores the perceived female roles within the domestic, it also captures an element of feminine domestic abuse. It looks at the carnivorous and beastial, and as much of Lacy’s work deals with questions

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surrounding violence towards women and rape, she seems to be articulating the connection between language and repression. Looking at the flesh lying on the table, she seems to be saying that ‘You (woman) are the meat’:

Here’s what you do: get down on all fours and imagine you are a lamb. Try to imitate the movements a lamb would make and notice which muscles you use. Imagine you are a curious animal, often turning, lowering and raising your head…\(^{211}\)

In addition to *Learn Where the Meat Comes From* she has used vampires as a metaphor in many of her other works. She sees the vampire as being ‘a desire to conquer death, which (…) is very strong among artists’. She explores the vampire myth, horror and monstrosity because she is interested in ‘the sense of bodies moving through space, being separate, being vulnerable, being immensely physical.’\(^{212}\)

Francesca Gavin, author of *Hell Bound: New Gothic Art* (2008), speaks about this relationship between art and horror, which I see present in the work of Rosler and Lacy:

Horror (…) connects to one of our most primal desires: Voyeurism. The imagery of death and evil could be a metaphor for art itself – the uncontrollable desire to look. By looking at violence or horror we become complicit in its creation, part of the cause – hence part of the discomfort in looking. We know that humans are often the cause of terror, not some imaginary outside evil force. We are creating our own nightmares.\(^{213}\)

Through this metaphor of the vampire in the domestic space, Suzanne Lacy explores this element of voyeurism and fetish in her work. Amanda Fernbach in her book *Fantasies of Fetishism* (2002), believes that ‘just as sexual fetishism is a redirection of the sexual urge, the blood bingeing of the vampire is a highly sexualized re-direction of the drive for nourishment.’\(^{214}\) Lacy presents the polished look of the TV chef, and gradually diminishes it until just the image of the woman remains, voyeuristically watched, and as such is left having no more value than the image of the lamb’s carcass itself. Not only does Lacy subvert the domestic space, she also focuses heavily on the link between

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\(^{211}\) Lacy, ‘Learn Where the Meat Comes From: Transcript’, op. cit.


monstrosity and femininity, or as discussed earlier – ‘the domestic space had become the locality for the worst of horror’. As Nina Auerbach points out, the vampire ‘can be everything we are, while at the same time, they are fearful reminders of the infinite things we are not’.\textsuperscript{215} Lacy seems to evoke this in Learn Where the Meat Comes From – she is using the metaphor of monster to suggest the incongruities within the domestic. And ‘the invasion of the private and secure sphere of the home by some unknown evil force exemplifies the conflict between interior and exterior worlds, between individual and society, and between the intra- and intersubjective’.\textsuperscript{216} Vampires are both thrilling and repulsive, alive and dead, dangerous and desirable – they are liminal creatures, and Lacy invokes their power to show that she is more than merely the expected and perceived role of ‘wife, mother, cook’.

\textbf{VALIE EXPORT}

An artist that stood out for me when looking at women’s video work at the time The Exorcist was released was the performance- and video-based artist VALIE EXPORT. Born in 1940, EXPORT is an Austrian artist whose work is seen as overtly feminist. She changed her name from Waltraud Lehner in 1967, to ‘erase her father’s and husband’s name’, and took instead a name from a popular cigarette brand. EXPORT’s most infamous work was a 1969 guerrilla performance entitled Aktionshose: GenitalPanik (Fig. 10), where she entered a cinema in Munich during a screening, wearing blue jeans with the crotch removed, challenging the audience to look at the real thing instead of passively enjoying and objectifying the images of women on the screen. Rather than attempt the subversion of television like Rosler and Lacy, EXPORT’s practice overtly confronts the image of the woman in the cinema.

The differences between cinema and television are very apparent; John Ellis notes:

Cinema offers a large scale, highly detailed and photographic image to a spectator who is engaged in an activity of intense and relatively sustained attention to it. Broadcast TV offers a small image of low definition, to which sound is crucial in holding the spectator’s

\textsuperscript{216} Christoph Grunenberg, \textit{Gothic: Transmutations in Late 20th Century Art}, MIT Press, Massachusetts, 1997, p. 176.
attention. The spectator glances rather than gazes at the screen; attention is sporadic rather than sustained.\textsuperscript{217}

Television, with its direct address, short narrative structure and constant breaks for advertising, is very different to the immersive narrative of cinema. And it is cinema’s immersion, based on a form of suture, that \textit{EXPORT} challenges. Suture theory deals with the ‘stitching’ of narrative that film tries to achieve; due to its two-dimensional quality, a sense of coherence must be made in terms of spatial awareness and thus filmic techniques such as shot-reverse-shot spatially position the characters in the diegesis. This technique is formatted so that the audience can become involved in the imaginary reality presented on screen – we must ignore the fact that the image is a construction of reality, immerse ourselves in the narrative, and subsequently identify with the characters. Through the invariably fractured images of filming, this technique of ‘seamlessness’ attempts to create a sense of visual and narrative wholeness into which we are hopefully absorbed – suture binds the gaps between vision and absence.

The term and context of suture can be accredited to Lacan’s psychoanalytic analysis of the mirror stage. Constituting the subject involves a constant reordering of what s/he is and is not; the image in the mirror presents an imaginary sense of subjectivity, but one that is based on an image, a false recognition. In other words, the body can never be seen as a whole, it can only be seen in parts – fragmented through vision. The mirror image supplies a whole, but it is only a representation of the body, it only symbolises completeness and the subject must disavow the fragmentation to form a sense of subjectivity, and this provides subsequent entry into the Symbolic order (as discussed in Chapter One). Similarly, images in cinema are fragments that must be ordered to create a whole, the process of continuity editing creates a position for the viewing subject in the film and provides us with logical information. It creates an appearance of mastery, because ‘we see everything the camera sees,’\textsuperscript{218} but like the mirror-image, the screen-image cannot show us everything – thus both the subject-in-process and the cinematic film is based on lack. As Kaja Silverman notes:

Suture can be understood as the process whereby the inadequacy of the [viewing] subject’s position is exposed in order to facilitate (i.e. create the desire for) new insertions into a cultural discourse which promises to make good that lack. Since the promised compensation involves an ever greater subordination to already existing scenarios, the viewing subject’s position is a supremely passive one, a fact which is carefully concealed through cinematic sleight-of-hand.219

Silverman believes that this sleight-of-hand ‘involves attributing to a character within the fiction qualities which in fact belong to the machinery of enunciation: the ability to generate narrative, the omnipotence and coercive gaze, the castrating authority of the law.’220 In other words, the film produces imagery that makes the audience believe they have power over the narrative, and the most masterful gaze that can be generated is that of the male protagonist.

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220 ibid., p. 232.
Although published after the works discussed in this chapter, Laura Mulvey’s essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975) is very important to all the artists discussed here. In the essay, Mulvey positions filmic suture through the female body, and her body becomes a spectacle for the male’s desire and/or generates a sense of male character/male audience identification. Mulvey writes:

> In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*.  

To explain, Mulvey sees woman as the image and man as the bearer of the look. Not only is there the position of lack in the audience from the Lacanian cinematic structure, but through Freudian analysis there is also a sense of lack in the female herself. This female figure signifies the fetish – something that the ‘look continually circles around but disavows; her lack of a penis, implying a threat of castration and hence unpleasure.’ Mulvey continues by saying:

> Desire, born with language, allows the possibility of transcending the instinctual and the imaginary, but its point of reference continually returns to the traumatic moment of its birth: the castration complex. Hence the look, pleasurable in form, can be threatening in content, and it is woman as representation/image that crystallises this paradox.

Mulvey believes that to combat this, the male must either be the sadistic voyeur, by re-enacting the trauma of the ‘lack’ and ‘investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery’, which ‘punishes or endangers the woman through the agency of an active and powerful character,’ as Silverman discusses with regard to suture. Or he must partake in fetishistic scopophilia, disavowing her castration and as such creating the image of woman as a fetish - a replacement for the missing phallus. As previously discussed and Elwes

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222 Ibid., p. 21.
223 Ibid., p. 18-19.
224 Williams, ‘When the Woman Looks’, op. cit., p. 22.
Explicates, this structure in film again phallocentrically positions the woman in the derogatory binary of whore (voyeuristic gaze) and virgin (fetishistic gaze). 225

Returning to VALIE EXPORT, her performance *Aktionshose: GenitalPanik* deals with the image of woman that is objectified in film, whether voyeuristically or fetishistically. Another version of the *Aktionshose: GenitalPanik* was purportedly performed in a porn cinema, but was later denied by EXPORT to have taken place. 226 Rather than simply a critique of porn, which feminist writers including Andrea Dworkin describes as the ‘graphic sexually explicit subordination of women,’ 227 EXPORT’s performances and videos deal with the passive role of femininity in any cinematic experience. Anti-pornography feminists position women in a role of non-sexuality, 228 which is, as I will discuss in EXPORT’s later video work, the opposite of what she attempts to achieve. The original (and possibly only) *Aktionshose: GenitalPanik* and other pieces by EXPORT explore issues of the suture in cinema and open up questions around the phallocentric voyeurism and fetishism of the feminine; through modes of monstrosity and references to horror, as well as the use of the abject and sexual female body, EXPORT provides an alternative view of femininity that both ruptures phallic suture and explores the space of female sexuality previously denied by the focus on the phallus in psychoanalysis and culture.

...Remote...Remote...

In 1973, the same year *The Exorcist* was made, VALIE EXPORT created two single channel video pieces. In a sense, these videos are a diptych because, as I shall discuss, they deal with the dichotomy of pain and pleasure.

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225 Mulvey’s *Visual Pleasure*... essay has, since its publication, been intensely critiqued by feminists and film theorists alike, because it does not discuss the positions of other viewers in film. Theorist have, including Mulvey herself, challenged her presumption of the male viewer by reordering viewing through female, non-white, gay, lesbian and bisexual cinema audiences. While these critiques are very relevant and I will endeavour to address them, the artworks I am discussing are located in a similar context, that of second-wave feminism, and visibly explore the issues that Mulvey purports in 1975, thus I will apply her theories to the work examined.


228 As sex-positive feminist Ellen Willis notes, ‘the claim [by anti-pornography feminists] that “pornography is violence against women” was code for the neo-Victorian idea that men want sex and women endure it.’ Ellen Willis, ‘Lust Horizons: The “Voice” and the Women’s Movement,’ in *The Village Voice*, October 2005.
The first video from VALIE EXPORT is …Remote…Remote…, a ten-minute performance-to-camera video, which deals with pain. It opens up with a still photograph of two children standing up in a cot and holding each other’s hands. The older male child looks blankly at the camera, while the female infant stares to her right. This blown-up photograph is an old police archive image of children that were taken away from their parents because of physical and sexual abuse. This image becomes the backdrop for the performance. The camera pans out from the younger child’s eyes, and gradually EXPORT appears, sitting in front of the image, her body positioned between the two children, her eyes level with the older child in the photograph. As the camera proceeds to pan out, we see the edges of the photograph and EXPORT sitting on a stool, holding something in her right hand, with a clear bowl filled with milk balanced between her legs. There is a sudden close up of EXPORT’s crotch, showing the bowl of milk and the object that she is holding – a large craft knife. The camera slowly pans upwards from the knife to EXPORT’s face, which is passive and emotionless. When the camera reaches her face, it cuts to a close up of her eyes, then a slow pan from one eye to the other is followed by a series of shot-reverse-shots between EXPORT’s eyes and the eyes of the young girl in the photograph.

Another cut to the full image, now we can see what EXPORT is doing with the knife. She is slowly stabbing and cutting away the cuticles on her fingernails, and as the camera zooms into her hands we can begin to see the blood dripping from the wounds. Methodically, EXPORT slices away the cuticles and dips her bloody fingers into the bowl of milk, allowing the blood and milk to mix, as the camera performs several close-ups which allows us to see the blood change the colour of the milk into swirls of white and pink, like a flavoured ice-cream. Towards the end of the video, EXPORT puts her finger into her mouth and chews off the cuticle and swallows it. There are then quick cuts from her mouth to that of the older child, and then to the mouth of the infant. The video ends by EXPORT disappearing suddenly (via a cut) and a slow zoom into the photograph, which ends the video where it began. (This could be seen as a cyclical motion, a loop that evokes the idea that the concepts being dealt with are repetitive and interminable.)

EXPORT’s expression throughout the video does not change; even during the self-mutilation she shows no emotion, her expression throughout is one of stoic endurance. The action is completely destructive, and pointless. This links to
references of the feminine and discussions of beauty; she is referencing and critiquing pointless acts of pain, like the cuticle removal, like waxing, and other beautification processes to accentuate female attractiveness for the male. There is a sense of (auto)masochism; it speaks of the ‘beauty-equals-pain’ paradigm, and the objectified image of the feminine – as well as a physical pain that must be hidden from view, to be silently endured by women. As Joanna Keirnan notes:

I feel that Valie Export [sic] forces me, watching this film, into the male position of watching pain; alienating, repulsing, and terrorizing me with it. But she also forces me to acknowledge men’s fear of rupture – and my fear of their fear. As well as childbirth, there is menstruation, and while this is something completely familiar to a woman, it remains taboo in the culture and hidden from the sight.229

Here in …Remote…Remote…, EXPORT breaks the literal surface of the skin, but she also visually represents the metaphorical ‘wound’ of the Freudian castration complex.

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In ...Remote...Remote... the fingers become phallic objects, entering and thrusting into the milk – an overtly sexual implication. The bowl placed on EXPORT’s crotch accentuate this, there is an allusion to masturbation as she places her fingers between her legs. Yet as her bleeding and wounded fingers enter the liquid, they seem to be repeatedly soothed by the milk; I see this as a maternal reference, the succour of the mother. The maternal bond, with its focus on protection comes about strongly from EXPORT’s use of the milk. It is a maternal act of preservation, of protecting, of literally the ‘licking of wounds’. Through the use of blood in ...Remote...Remote... EXPORT creates this disruption to her whole, complete and intact body by cutting into it, creating a ‘wound’, and then soothing it by soaking her fingers in the milk. It seems that it is a metaphor for the constant desire to return to the maternal pre-Symbolic, and subsequently pre-castration chora discussed by Julia Kristeva – a time before language and without the feminine label of ‘lack’. The Exorcist’s Regan is also guilty of this desire to be with the mother, yet in a monstrous and incestuous manner, as I will discuss later.

In ...Remote...Remote..., EXPORT chews off her cuticles and eats them. Maud Ellman believes:

> It is through the act of eating that the ego establishes its own domain, distinguishing its inside from its outside. But it is also in this act that the frontiers of subjectivity are most precarious. Food, like language, is originally vested in the other, and traces of that otherness remain in every mouthful that one speaks – or chews.\(^\text{230}\)

In other words, mother and child have a connection through breast-feeding, and subsequently food is constant reminder of the mother-as-Other. EXPORT’s action is monstrous – it has a cannibalistic element about it; she eats her own self-mutilated flesh. It also recalls the myth of Ouroboros, which historically references liminality, the cyclical nature of life, life out of death and between inside and outside – she swallows what she has done. This image hints at the grotesque vision of the female body, the ‘wide-open bodily abyss.’\(^\text{231}\) At the same time, food has a very abject quality, as ‘food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection’\(^\text{232}\) and it, as Ellman’s quote discusses, relates the video again back to the mother-as-other.

\(^{230}\) As cited in Rosemary Betterton, *Intimate Distance*, op. cit., p. 144.
\(^{231}\) Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, op. cit., p. 317.
Mixing of milk with the blood in ...Remote...Remote... stems from the maternal, as it recalls the Jewish dietary laws of Kashrut (Kosher) regarding ‘the milk of the mother and the blood of the child’, an ancient religious belief that you should not ‘seethe a kid in his mother’s milk.’²³³ This, interestingly, is also an ancient reference to incest, which links into the images of the sexually abused children in EXPORT’s background photograph. Incest is an important factor in the discussion of abjection. When Julia Kristeva writes about abjection, she mentions that the ‘abolishment of [Jewish] dietary taboos’ returns to the [female] body as being the source of abjection. She discusses that Jesus’ teachings (‘Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth the man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.’²³⁴) led Christianity to break away from the Jewish ‘pure/impure dichotomy into an inside/outside one’. Kristeva believes that: ‘For evil, thus replaced into the subject, will not cease tormenting him from within, no longer as a polluting or defiling substance, but as the eradicable repulsion of his henceforth divided and contradictory being.’²³⁵ In ...Remote...Remote... EXPORT visually connects the two dichotomies together, placing the Jewish taboo (mixing the milk and blood) with the Christian one (cutting evoking the inside and outside). With that she visually evokes Ellman’s oral otherness and Kristeva’s divided and contradictory being.

Barbara Creed speaks of Regan from The Exorcist as a divided being: Creed writes that the ‘possessed or invaded being is a figure of abjection in that the boundary between self and other has been transgressed’.²³⁶ The film has many elements that connect to the object, and The Exorcist scene quoted above has, like the work of EXPORT, strong connections with the discussion of incest. While on the surface, The Exorcist seems to be a representation of the battle between good and evil, I feel that the real basis of the film is this unusual relationship between the mother Chris MacNeil and the daughter Regan. Regan’s strange behaviour is firstly believed to be a bad reaction to Chris’s recent divorce from Regan’s father. As Regan begins to show signs of ‘possession’, she becomes more sexual. Throughout the film, Regan is perceived to be ‘innocent’ of any of these sexual transgressions, but the facts

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²³⁴ ibid.
²³⁶ Creed, The Monstrous-Feminine, op. cit., p. 32.
believe this. Firstly, Regan is almost thirteen and pubescent (which denotes a sexual awakening), and secondly, she has a very close dyadic relationship with her mother which is seen as a ‘refusal of the mother and child to recognise the paternal order, [and] is what produces the monstrous.’

Again, this links to the desire for the chora present in ...Remote...Remote..., as previously discussed. Regan-as-Demon in the scene quoted at the beginning of this chapter ‘pulls Chris’s head down, rubbing her face sensually against the pelvic area, then lifts her head and smashes Chris a blow across the chest that sends her reeling across the room and crashing to a wall with stunning force while Demon laughs with bellowing spite.’

The scene is the most important in The Exorcist, as it exemplifies the religious aspect of the film, which denounces the abject taboos of incest, and of masturbation (with the crucifix). The opposite is true of EXPORT’s work. While The Exorcist is about sexuality and ‘a “ritual” of purification that permits the spectator to wallow vicariously in normally taboo forms of behaviour before restoring order,’ EXPORT displays these religious taboos for all to see, and does not restore any kind of harmony at the end.

The use of the shot-reverse-shot technique between both EXPORT and the young girl’s eyes are a fascinating element to ...Remote...Remote..., as eyes are culturally seen as ‘windows to the soul’, and here they allude to the gaze, as well as identification. The eyes in the video have a similar quality to Regan’s eyes whereby the audience sees Regan’s possession corporeally embodied as they roll into the back of her head. Regan’s eyes are the first physical manifestation of the ‘demonic’, there is an emphatic sense of expectation that something will happen next (as I will discuss further in Interim Two), and similarly in ...Remote...Remote... the eyes are analysed before the cutting action takes place. EXPORT seems to want to demonstrate how passive her eyes are, that they show no emotion, how they are frozen like the children in the photograph, unable to express their emotions. Through this technique, there is an ‘identification between the children and the performer, which is established as the camera cuts from the pupil of the child’s eye to the pupil of the performer’s eye’. But are the child’s eyes controlling, like that of the possessive male viewer in Mulvey’s concept of cinema? It seems not, because

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237 Ibid., p. 38.
239 Ibid., p. 37.
the boy’s image is frozen, staring at the audience, just like EXPORT’s, and the girl looks away, staring beyond the frame. Positioned between the two children, EXPORT denies the passive feminine position and conversely positions herself actively, like the masculine. As Mulvey notes, there are three forms of the look in cinema: the look of the camera that films, the look of the characters (focusing on the active male look) within the filmic illusion, and the look of the voyeuristic and fetishistic spectator, but where is the look of the character looking at the camera and subsequently the audience? Mulvey notes that the conventions of narrative deny the camera and the spectator’s look, and focuses on the character’s look to achieve any sort of allusion to reality. But in …Remote…Remote…, through EXPORT’s look there is an awareness of both the camera and the audience. This process ruptures suture and disallows both fetishistic and sadistic viewing, the sadist does not have an active male to identify with, and the fetishist cannot disavow castration – because what stands out in the video is the violence of the cutting, a monstrous-feminine violence that can be seen in both Rosler’s and Lacy’s work. The cutting suggests a ‘cutting away’ from masculine objectification, and constantly reiterates the ‘wound of castration’ with every finger she slices.

**Mann & Frau & Animal**

This feminine ‘wound’ leads me on to the second piece by VALIE EXPORT, an eight-minute video entitled Mann & Frau & Animal (Man & Woman & Animal). The first scene opens with a black & white close up of a tap with attached showerhead. The shaking of the hand-held camera zooms and focuses on the taps infrequently. There are a series of cuts, which close in and out of the tap, and display a white tiled bathroom with bath (a more detailed analysis of bathrooms as spaces of horror will be discussed later in Interim Four). The process resembles a scientific analysis, focusing in and out of every detail of the bath in short cuts. After about a minute, a hand enters the frame and turns on the taps, water flows quickly out into the bath and the familiar sound of running water is heard loudly breaking the previous silence. The leaking taps now flowing with hot steaming water are again analysed by the camera, until it pans down the flow of water (still hand-held) and focuses on the plughole. There is an obvious parody of Psycho taking place, conjured up by the swirl of
the water – and then the audience realises that the set up of the mise-en-scene is reminiscent of the infamous ‘shower scene’, with each cut of the camera similar to Hitchcock’s use of shots filmed to evoke stabbing. As the camera pans back up from the plughole to the taps, a hand grasps the showerhead and hose and slowly begins to unscrew them. The hand takes off the showerhead and allows the water to flow from the hose. There is a sharp cut, the image changes from black & white to sepia toned, and the bath shows the torso of a woman lying with her legs apart. She is wearing an ugly, greying white bra that is barely seen in the shot, and she has lifted the shower hose above her crotch and is allowing the water to flow onto her clitoris. Her other hand is holding her labia away from her clitoris to allow the water to make contact, and as the pressure of the water hits her genitals, she begins to softly moan.

Fig. 12. VALIE EXPORT, Mann & Frau & Animal, 1973. Single channel 16mm film, black & white and colour, 9:00 mins, four film stills.

For over three minutes the camera is focused on her crotch, watching her masturbate with the water, cutting and zooming in and out towards her clitoris until the sound of her moaning ceases. A white screen depicting a black
equilateral triangle replaces the image of the woman. The image remains on the screen, and the silence is replaced with a deep guttural groaning. The sound seems to be a parody of a male sexual pleasure. The triangle is replaced by a close up of female genitalia which contracts with muscle movements, it is covered in a creamy white liquid, possibly vaginal lubricant or semen, and the grunts that are heard seem to be coming from the vagina. It seems to be a Vagina Loquens, but of what does it speak? The image changes again, and the white liquid on the vaginal entrance is replaced by blood. As the sound stops, the triangle appears again, and the same image of the vagina is shown as a photograph in a developing tray. The genitals are devoid of blood or lubricant this time, but a (male) hand appears from above the tray and drips blood onto the open genitals, mirroring the blood from the previous image.

The video is difficult to watch. The hand-held camera is sickly, the video is very overt and the culturally conceived images of sexuality are not present here; there are no smooth, sensuous camera pans, and no subtlety. In the first scene, the face is out of frame, the breasts are covered up, and that ugly bra is far from the ‘sexy lingerie’ typically seen in Hollywood cinema or pornography. As is the tedious focusing on the tap and bath - what porn film would spend time looking at the objects in the room? The image becomes monotonous, and the vagina-as-spectacle is replaced with indifference to the image. A three minute close-up of just a clitoris or labia is not generally something that you would experience, and as such the video is about exposing the private into the public, something hidden, personal, monotonous, something that should have remained behind closed doors, and is culturally not acceptable – female pleasure – pleasure that is not eroticised by the male vision of what it should look like for their voyeuristic enjoyment. Mulvey discusses this when she points out that the ‘unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form.’ As such we are so used to these images of masculine desire that when we experience another form of expression, like this piece, it becomes very difficult to watch, as it is an inscription of a kind of sexuality that has been left out of representation. The video is a filmic visualisation of Aktionshose: GenitalPanik, she is confronting the audience saying: ‘Look at me, enjoying my own body. See what a real woman wants, and what she really looks like when she does it.’ And whatever small sense of the voyeuristic that may still come through from the masturbating woman is obliterated when the camera and audio cuts and

focuses on the ‘horrific’, blood covered vagina that is reminiscent of the Freudian wound, which recalls the ...Remote...Remote... self-mutilation. Kristeva believes that menstruation is representative of this wound, she writes:

> Menstrual blood ... stands for the danger issuing from within identity (social or sexual); it threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and, through internalization, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference.²⁴²

In a way, EXPORT’S image of the bleeding vagina is the visualisation of the monstrous metaphor. The Other is dangerous, monstrous, disgusting, and abject – ‘it is in the normal image of the man that our certainties are invested and, by implication, in that of the woman that they constantly threaten collapse.’²⁴³

*Mann & Frau & Animal* is divided in three by the recurring image of the equilateral triangle. The triangle is unusual as it is cut next to the image of the vulva and it would seem that it is in some way intended to represent the vagina as a symbol, but the triangle is inverted thereby denoting the symbol of the masculine (blade), as opposed to the feminine (chalice). Is the image of the vagina being penetrated by this symbolic representation of the masculine? In another interpretation, in Christian theology the equilateral triangle represents the Holy Trinity, symbolising the union of three ‘persons’ (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit). Again, as in ...Remote...Remote... and *The Exorcist*, EXPORT references religion and taboo by placing the images of female masturbation beside a devotional symbol of the Christian doctrine. It seems to allude to theories behind patriarchy, and religious indoctrination of this concept – as it shows that the symbol of the Trinity is also the symbol of the ‘blade’. Again, if the image of the equilateral triangle were reversed, with the point facing downwards, it would, interestingly, reference the Black Triangle – a symbol of ‘difficult’ women (possibly relating to lesbians and/or female ‘sexual deviance’) stemming from the fabric ‘branding’ within Nazi Concentration camps.

The image of the triangle/Trinity is also an allusion to the three-noun title, which divides (and yet, connects) the film into the three parts – ‘Man-Woman-Animal.’ The masturbating woman is presented in the ‘Man’ section; it seems to be a metaphor to represent the myth that man, not woman, is the sexual being. The ‘Woman’ section presents the male grunting sound with the bloody female genitals, which denotes the image of woman as voyeuristic object and

the vagina as disgusting and bloody ‘wound’ – again, a reference to, as Mulvey notes, ‘woman’s desire [being] subjugated to her image as bearer of the bleeding wound; she can exist only in relation to castration and cannot transcend it.’

The third section, ‘Animal’, depicts the photograph of the vagina bloodied by the hand of the male, an expression of the cultural perception of masculine sexuality as natural, which insinuates that the display of female sexuality is unnatural and monstrous.

The masculine grunting references in Mann & Frau & Animal have similar qualities to the guttural voice of Regan-as-Demon in The Exorcist. In EXPORT’s video, the sound seems to be coming from the vagina, and yet has a masculine tone. This incongruity seems to project the ambiguity present in the representation of female sexuality, EXPORT seems to clarify that it has no history other than to be related back to or extrapolated from the masculine. Similarly in The Exorcist, the masculine voice is actually made by a woman, but is also perceived as male, as it is deep and overly sexual. Barbara Creed discusses this in relation to the sound of Regan’s apparent male-demon voice. She believes that the voice projected as male shows that Regan’s body is ‘a body in revolt’:

Regan’s voice is an example of the transgression of the borders between inside and outside, masculine and feminine, self and other – and it relates, as discussed earlier, to the monstrous vampire of Suzanne Lacy’s work. It too is abject, as it is ‘what does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.’ Barbara Freeman suggests that artists can utilize manipulations of literary language and link them to video practices in an attempt to subvert filmic narrative. She focuses on Deleuze and Guattari’s essay What Is A Minor Literature (1983) to explore their discussions of literary subversion of language, and deems it as a ‘semiotic insurgency.’ This act of rebellion can be seen in two forms of literature, the first form (described by Freeman as ‘fat’ aesthetic) ‘dislodges referentiality’ by ‘overloading the dominant language to

246 Kristeva, Powers of Horror, op. cit., p. 4.

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the point of explosion via neologism, hypotaxis, or semantic overpacking.'

The second (‘thin’) form reduces language to its bare minimum, via parataxis, repetition, and ‘pronominal ambiguity.’ This second form can be seen in EXPORT’s use of the grunting vulva. These forms of language manipulation are related to bodily forms and bodily interactions, a ‘minor space’ that is being ‘plugged into the political’, and ‘there is no subject: there are only collective arrangements of utterance.’ Deleuze and Guattari believe:

Every language implies a deterritorialization – of the mouth, of the teeth, of the tongue. Mouth, tongue, teeth have their primitive territory in food. In devoting themselves to the articulation of sounds, they deterritorialize themselves. There is a certain disjunction between eating and speaking – still more, despite appearances, between eating and writing: no doubt it is easier to eat while writing than to eat while speaking, but writing transforms words into things capable of rivaling food. Disjunction between content and expression. To speak, and especially to write, is to fast.

While they were writing about the immigrant’s attempt at writing in a dominant national language, Freeman sees this semiotic rebellion as a corporeal description of pain and pleasure, through ‘gorging and purging, bloating and wasting the language – (it is) a mode of embodying language itself.’

In Mann & Frau & Animal, this corporeality of the cinematic challenges passivity, as the body is ‘not only a sign to be read, a symptom to be deciphered, but also a force to be reckoned with.’ Through the connection of language and the female body a new form of sexuality may be developed.

In Mann & Frau & Animal EXPORT displays images of ‘a woman in revolt’. The photograph of the vagina in the tray represents two concepts. The first is a metaphor of the psychoanalysis-based visualisation of the vagina-as-wound, which is expressed by the male hand dripping the blood onto the image as a reflection of the castration complex, the lost phallus. It is her lack that can create his lack, the castrating Vagina Dentata of legend which EXPORT’s grunting vagina is not far from – because something that utters must also have a mouth, and possibly emasculating teeth. But at the same time, the image in the tray seems to denote or suggest that there is a ‘lack’ in the cultural viewing

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250 Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards A Corporeal Feminism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1994, p. 120.
of ‘woman’. Both videos seem to speak of the experiences that woman goes through, a pain that must be silently endured, a pleasure that must be hidden. In a sense, both ...Remote...Remote... and Mann & Frau & Animal are about ‘rendering the unconscious visible,’ as Roswither Mueller writes:

Two of the most tabooed images, orgasmic and menstruating female genitals, are displayed, in close-ups and medium shots, as candidly and matter-of-factly as the production of pain in ...Remote...Remote.... If patriarchal power is indeed predicated on the register of the visible, these two films are serious incursions into the mythological preserve from Dionysus to Christ that had granted women only auxiliary roles in the orgiastic display of pleasure and pain.  

This concept links into the ideas mentioned earlier about women taking over the medium of video, as it was a nascent medium, one that did not have the masculine historical hold. EXPORT is visually expressing this in Mann & Frau & Animal; through the medium of video she is penetrating and renouncing these ‘auxiliary roles’ by asserting a feminine independence from the male-orientated and subsequent cultural vision of sex. In other words, as Teresa de Lauretis discusses:

‘Sexuality (is) a construct and a (self-)representation; and ... does have both a male form and a female form, although in the patriarchal or male-centred frame of mind, the female form is a projection of the male’s, its complementary opposite, its extrapolation – Adam’s rib, so to speak. So that, even when it is located in the woman’s body, ...sexuality is perceived as an attribute or a property of the male.

This links again the work of EXPORT and The Exorcist. In the previously cited scene, Regan masturbates with a crucifix. Although the use of the crucifix-as-dildo is definitely blasphemous, and let us not forget that (patriarchal) profanity is the supposed crux of the story, I feel that the more taboo image is actually the representation of Regan masturbating. A girl/woman partaking in self-pleasure is what the scene is discussing, woman being sexually fulfilled without the need for a man. Yet the film repeatedly denounces that this could be possible, Regan could not possibly pleasure herself, could not fantasize about having sex with her mother, could not display the ‘abject’ acts of urinating in

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251 Mueller, VALIE EXPORT, op. cit., p. 47.
252 ibid.
public, bleeding, having boils on her face, making lewd suggestions, swearing, vomiting. No, Regan was apparently ‘possessed by the devil’, and not in control of her own body, because culturally sexuality is the ‘property of the male.’ And just to prove this, in the end of the film she was presented as innocent, pure and none the wiser for her experience – which I doubt very much would be the case in actuality. And so, returning to Mann & Frau & Animal, as in ...Remote...Remote..., EXPORT does not present female sexuality in order allow the spectator to ‘wallow in taboo’ before denouncing it – she presents the work with no apology and allows the audience into her subjective experience.

I began this chapter with an excerpt from the screen play of The Exorcist by William Peter Blatty because I was interested in the way the representation of the vulva was discussed in the text – ‘which we cannot (and will not) see.’ Yet in EXPORT’s work, we can see, AND DO SEE. Rather than eschew the long-standing phallocentric perception of feminine monstrosity – the ‘lack’, VALIE EXPORT opened up desires that were generally hidden – what is presented as ‘horrific’ in films such as The Exorcist – for all to see. This monstrosity that EXPORT appropriated seems to have a cathartic effect, she reclaims the image as a means of self-empowerment. These images are not comfortable, but these supposed ‘transgressive’ desires do arise, and are nowhere more prolific than in the depiction of ‘monstrous female sexuality’ in the horror film – yet ‘the foul impulses of horror lie not in the movie but in the spectator.’

As in Mulvey’s Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, EXPORT’s work deals with an attempt to ‘conceive a new language of desire.’ But Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock noted in 1981 that visualizing women’s sexualized bodies ‘are easily retrieved and co-opted by a male culture because they do not rupture radically meanings and connotation of women in art as body, as sexual, as nature, as object for male possession.’ Did EXPORT’s use of the overtly sexual female body in her work disallow reappropriation by patriarchy, or merely position the feminine back into the whore/virgin dichotomy? Perhaps it did return to this binary. Jane Gallop notes:

255 Mulvey, Visual and Other Pleasures, p. 16.
Difference produces great anxiety. Polarisation, which is the theatrical representation of difference, tames and binds that anxiety. The classic example is sexual difference, which is represented as polar opposition (active-passive, energy-matter, and all the other polar oppositions that share the trait of taming the anxiety that specific difference provoke). 257

As Mulvey writes in her 1983 essay Changes: Thoughts on Myth, Narrative and Historical Experience, her essay Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema from 1975, alongside much of the work in the second-wave of feminism, positioned the woman back into the binary of masculine/feminine because it only allowed an ‘either/or’ form of representation. Through feminist video and politics, the second-wave practice of denying or exposing patriarchy was ‘important for analysing the existing state of things’ but much of this work ultimately remained caught ‘within its own dualistic terms.’ 258 Mulvey notes that the problem with second-wave feminism was that it ‘seemed to leave the argument trapped within its own conceptual frame of reference, unable to advance politically into a new terrain or suggest an alternative theory of spectatorship in the cinema.’ 259 However, all is not lost. Mulvey’s Visual Pleasure... essay and the work of Rosler, Lacy, and EXPORT belong to ‘a particular moment in history of our particular movement,’ 260 and they formed a ‘motor force in the early phases of [the] movement, initiating and expressing the desire for change.’ 261

But what can be done now? In contemporary culture today, as in art and cinema, an alternative notion of ‘change without closure’ is what Mulvey proposes. It is liminality between binaries that can create change. While the use of the liminal vampire by Lacy, and allusions to the abject by all the above artists have powerful resonances that can exceed second-wave feminism, their denial of patriarchy’s active role will always position them back into the binary. As I shall discuss in Chapter Three, inspired by these earlier works, the practices of younger contemporary video artist present a fascinating insight into the power of the monstrous-feminine while at the same time dealing with this sense of liminality to explore issues of the feminine in a space between the phallic binary.

259 ibid.
260 ibid., p. 163.
261 ibid., p. 164.
In an ongoing series of work, entitled *The Lick Drawings*, using graphite and Fabriano paper, which is a departure from my usual practice of video installation, I draw specific stills taken from horror films, and then lick out the ‘horrific’ element therein. Ironically, the abrasive paper and the pressure of the licking action causes my tongue to bleed and, and the disgusting part of the image is actually replaced by my blood and saliva. I am ‘helping’ the image by removing its horrific element, but I am also giving it a part of me - something
that is just as horrific. I feel that the action is a removal of the metaphorical abject into the literal.

The drawings themselves developed from my video pieces. As discussed in Interim One, I was working with the mouth in several of my videos, but I had also been writing words and sentences on the walls of my studio with ink and permanent markers. I began to write on my body, and produced the video installation Black and Purple (2008). This piece involved me writing ‘DENY’ on my face and rubbing it off using my saliva and hand, referencing a mother cleaning a child’s face. Positioning one monitor on top of another, the top channel plays in reverse, and the bottom channel is an inverted mirror image of the upper video. The installation was looped and the two images meet in the middle for a split second before reversing back on itself – the upper channel showing the end of the video with the purple smudge of the ink making the word appear, and the lower channel beginning with the word which was slowly erased.

![Fig. 14. Jenny Keane, Black and Purple, 2008. Double channel video installation, 5:20 mins (looped), combined video still.](image)
I am alluding to the myth of Narcissus, with the intention of providing a queer reading in the video – creating a site between the maternal and the narcissistic, as I will discuss more thoroughly in Chapter Four. What stood out for me in the video is the slow increase of blackness on my tongue from the licking, the black tongue referencing lying and alluding to the melancholic humor escaping from the body. The concept of the black tongue was developed further in my next video Ingeminated Battology, as discussed in Interim One.

After Ingeminated Battology I became interested in working with found imagery, exploring how certain scenes and images from film have become so iconic, particularly in horror, and I had worked on a series of videos that attempted to recreate horror scenes, such as the hand on the shower curtain in Psycho, or the twins in the long corridor from The Shining. Simultaneously, I had been filming performative actions of licking the words off the walls in my studio, and I began to draw the images from horror films on the walls so that I could lick them away. While very removed from my usual practice in video installation, I was interested in the concept of drawing because of the immediacy of the image – it is the ‘fundamental pictorial act,’ but at the same time, like my videos, drawing has a strange liminal quality. As Deanna Petherbridge notes, defining drawing ‘invites frustration or obsession in attempting to clarify something which is slippery and irresolute in its fluid status as performative act and idea; as sign, and symbol and signifier; as conceptual diagram as well as medium and process and technique.’ Drawing has a quality of experience; it is a tracing of movement that layers both the temporal and the spatial. Moving off the walls (the rough plaster was very painful!), I drew the images onto 70 x 100 cm Fabriano printing paper, and licked off the most horrific part of the image. I liked the difference between licking the wall and the paper, the paper warped and peeled, and the blood absorbed into it – the licked areas looked like wounds. The amount of licking depended on the image itself. In some cases it was just a small section, and in others, such as the drawing from the film Carrie, in which the protagonist has blood pouring all over her face, the licking almost obscures the whole drawing. These experiments in my studio developed into The Lick Drawings series, a project that still continues and expands to this day.

263 ibid., p. 27.
The process of creating The Lick Drawings is very important. I project the films by a data projector onto paper, pausing it at a frame I find appropriate and significant to the filmic narrative, and then draw the lines that I see. By using the projector in this way, I want to evoke a sense of being within the cinematic experience while doing the drawings – a direct link between the film and the drawing, and as such I feel that the process is an exploration of performative installation. In her book, Public Intimacy (2007), Giuliana Bruno discusses the connection between installation and cinema. She writes:

In many ways, the form of [installation] aesthetic – in which art melts into architecture - is reminiscent of the space occupied by cinema itself, the other architectural art form. In even more graphic terms, one might say that the rooms of an installation often become a literal projection room, transforming themselves into actual filmic space.\textsuperscript{264}

Within the process of creating these drawings I am establishing a filmic space, I want to be within the film as I recreate it. The finished drawing becomes the

film frozen in time, and the video documentation of the licking-action is the temporal fragment that remains.

In the beginning, I chose to document the action of licking the drawings because I feel that video art has the potential for recreating performative actions, as I mentioned in Chapter Two, as it plays with the idea of time and its potential to reach a broader audience, as well as having the potential to manipulate ways of seeing the performative body. Bruno speaks about the relationship between the body, the study and history of anatomy and of time-based images. She discusses the connection between ‘anatomy’ lessons and the exhibition of film as both are forms of popular spectacle and have ‘shared fantasmatic ground’:

Their common terrain is a discourse of investigation and the fragmentation of the body. The spectacle of the anatomy lesson exhibits an analytic drive, an obsession with the body, upon which acts of dismemberment are performed. Such analytic desire is present in the very language of film. It is inscribed in the semiotic construction of film, its découpage (as the very word connotes a “dissection” of narration in shots and sequences), its techniques of framing, and its process of editing, literally called “cutting”, a process of (de)construction of bodies in space.²⁶⁵

My video art practice explores these issues, and in the video documentation of the drawings I also was interested in exploring this use of ‘dissection’ of the female body, to evoke new ways of looking at performative art, and the body itself. Yet, the drawings themselves have a powerful presence as they have a visceral quality that, as I have mentioned before, literalizes abjection on the paper, and the videos did not have the same quality that I was achieving in the physical drawings. As such, as the process of making the drawings developed, I stopped documenting the work with video and instead started making live performances of the drawings in front of audiences, and also started creating the drawings in a much bigger scale, which I will discuss later.

While I am licking The Lick Drawings, it is more than just the action of licking; it also has an element of ingestion. I may only lick the paper, but I also, in a sense, eat it. Fragments of the paper fall into my mouth as I lick, as do the particles of graphite. As I discussed in Chapter Two, there is a reference to the mother in eating, because: ‘Food, like language, is originally vested in the other, and traces of that otherness remain in every mouthful that one speaks –

²⁶⁵ ibid., p. 93.
Food has a very abject quality, as ‘food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection’ and it relates the drawings back to the Otherness of the mother. By licking the paper, I have given them a part of me, my saliva and blood, and I have taken a part of them, broken up and ingested them – it is almost an experience of reciprocity. The maternal bond, with its focus on protection came about strongly from the licking, but this motherly element, however, becomes strangely sexual, as the licking also recalls a sexual act – I felt that the experience of licking the drawings was vying between thoughts of the paper being like a lover, but strangely at the same time, like a child. As I mentioned regarding Black and Purple, this connection has a homosexual connotation, as I will discuss later in Chapter Four, because sexuality that imbricates both the narcissistic and maternal implicitly suggests lesbian desire.

Because I discussed The Exorcist in Chapter Two, I wish to speak about the drawing from this film, chosen because the still evoked a sense of ‘awakening sexuality’, and indeed its repression. Regan is a young teen, (pre-) pubescent and very innocent. In basic terms, she becomes possessed by something inside of her and she begins to ‘change’. Barbara Creed discusses this by saying:

Connections drawn in the film between feminine desire, sexuality and abjection suggest that more is at stake than a simple case of demonic possession. Possession becomes the excuse for legitimizing a display of aberrant feminine behaviour which is depicted as depraved, monstrous, abject – and perversely appealing.

As Creed says, there is a fascination with the abject, as it is ‘constructed as a rebellion of filthy, lustful, carnal female flesh’. I was interested in exploring this and so, I selected the first moment Regan visually/corporally shows signs of her ‘possession’. Her eyes roll back into her head, her face contorts, and she opens her mouth in a harrowing scream. The still also appealed to me because it has elements of domesticity (the flowery blanket), femininity (flowing hair) and ambiguity (the open mouth). Is this girl in pain? In pleasure? Afraid? Shouting? Yawning? I wanted to use that particular image because I felt it had the quality of possibly being a mid-orgasmic moment, caught. La petite mort. I licked

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266 Betterton, Intimate Distance, op. cit., p. 144.
267 Kristeva, Powers of Horror, op. cit, p. 2.
269 ibid., p. 38.
away the eyes right through the paper, and kept going, through to the wall until every part of the graphite had been removed from around the eyes. When I stood back, I was amazed that the image had not lost its menacing quality, in fact, the image looked even more disturbing than before. I was fascinated at how the layers of the paper had formed to create almost concentric circles, replacement ‘eyes’, piercing eyes that stared at you even though there were just bloodied voids remaining.

The image of Regan’s eyes in the drawing might be described as self-reflexive. Not only is it the expression of the first physical signifier of her ‘possession’, it also discusses the presence of ‘Regan-as-Innocent’. She is looking internally, trying to see inwards and not outwards at the horrific – her eyes rolling inwards seem to display that Regan is not the ‘perpetrator’ of the abject acts to come in the film. However this is definitely not the case. As I discussed in Chapter Two, the film deals with the ‘refusal of the mother and child to recognise the paternal order, (and) is what produces the monstrous.’\footnote{Ibid.}

The \textit{Lick Drawings} with their relationship to sexuality and the maternal have this connection also. Particularly in \textit{The Exorcist} Lick Drawing, there is a constant...
process of layering – the film narrative itself evokes abjection, the still taken for the drawing has a very ambiguous and abject nature, and the action of licking literally causes blood, a very abject fluid, to appear onto the paper. Unlike The Exorcist film, in which the narrative re-establishes a sense of order at the end, the imbrication of content in the drawing evokes a sense of impenetrability - the presence of these abject layers expound a forcefulness that cannot be assimilated or restored.

Significantly, the eye is also a common trope in horror films; as well as classic films such as Bunuel’s seminal film, *Un Chien Andalou* (1929), where the opening scene is of a woman having her eye cut with a razor. The connection to seeing/not seeing in The Exorcist drawing also reminded me of Vito Acconci’s video *Pryings* (1971, Fig. 17). Giuliana Bruno believes that our fascination with looking causes us to have ‘an attraction for the dark sides of the visible’, and Francesca Gavin discusses that ‘the imagery of death and evil could be a metaphor for art itself – the uncontrollable desire to look.’

Leading from her analysis of the relationship between the moving image and anatomy, Bruno discusses that film pleasure, as it derives from the motion of ‘curiositas – the desire to explore mapped on ‘the lust of the eyes’ – is embedded in spectacle:

> The lust to find out leads to a fascination with seeing, a perceptual attraction for sites, and consequently the formation of spectacle. This type of lust may lead the traveller-spectator astray, for an aesthetic of attraction, with its perceptual shocks, implies distraction. (...) The lust of the eyes may turn into a panoramic-anatomic lust, leading our traveller-spectator into a curiosity for such things as mangled corpses.

Carol Clover is also interested in this relationship between voyeurism and horror. She sees this use of eyes in the horror film as an unconscious metaphor for horror being the ‘most self-reflexive of cinematic genres’:

> Horror privileges eyes because, more crucially than any other kind of cinema, it is about eyes. (...) From titles and posters to images of eyes, and from tales of blindness or paravision to plots involving audiences looking at (audiences looking at) horror movies, horror talks about itself.

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The Lick Drawing of Regan evokes this – the eyes subsequently represent more than just the possession. Drawing itself is about the visual, looking at an image and rendering it, but when the drawing was completed and licked, the piece seems to signify something more than that of any of the other images in The Lick Drawings series. It possesses a multilayered quality; it is multivalent and paradoxical. Through drawing the image, I feel that I (unintentionally) gave it the quality of something sensual, the fragility of the minute flowers on the blanket and the fluid hair had an air of being submerged – floating and peaceful. I kept drawing the hair freehand for hours, swirling and creating doodle-like patterns, joining lines and leaving lines solitary until I finally gave up. I was never really happy with the hair, but I knew that if I didn’t stop when I did, I would have continued until the area was a black and shiny smudge of graphite. When I had completed the drawing, I felt that while it referenced the girl’s possession, the physical lack in lieu of the eyes created by the licking also represented Regan’s absence or loss of innocence, but on a deeper level it also discussed the ‘eye in cinema.’ It also represented the act of creating the piece; I was making the drawing to be looked at, and then erasing it. And so,
like the void in the drawing, there is an aspect of the licked work that connects with the erasure of the visual itself – or in Mulvey’s terms, destroying visual pleasure.

As I discussed in Chapter Two, in Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, Laura Mulvey sees woman as the image and man as the bearer of the look. This female figure however, connotes something that the ‘look continually circles around but disavows; her lack of a penis, implying a threat of castration and hence unpleasure.’ 274 This theory is based on the premise that ‘woman-equals-lack.’ In terms of applying this concept to the visual, I feel that the action of licking the whites of Regan’s eyes in the Lick Drawing is a removal of a lack. The lack was metaphorically already present as the eyes were rolled inwards, and I erased the lack, which subsequently, and paradoxically created another one. Yet, somehow, the lack of a lack is a presence – the eyes are gone, but the void that remains becomes even more powerful. Does this presence create disharmony in the (male) voyeur’s visual pleasure? The licked drawing might paradoxically invoke the image of Regan to return the look. Similarly, the monster in the horror film does not fit into Mulvey’s concept of lack. Linda Williams speaks about the sexual difference of the horror film monster from the normal male in terms of ‘a frightening potency precisely where the normal male would perceive a lack,’ and the connections between monster and women which challenges woman’s supposed existence of something ‘to be looked at’ into something that is threatening and can look back:

The power and potency of the monster body in many classic horror films (...) should not be interpreted as an eruption of the normally repressed animal sexuality of the civilized male (the monster as double for the male viewer and characters in the film), but as the feared power and potency of a different kind of sexuality (the monster as double for the woman). 275

In other words, the monster and the female have a connection as they both have a form outside of the ‘normal’ male perception of sexuality, they subsequently become synonymous with each other – and the woman becomes just as powerful. Williams questions whether the horror film can actually achieve what this transgressive look attempts, because she believes that the horror film ‘punishes her for this very act [of looking], only to

275 Williams, ‘When the Woman Looks’, op. cit., p. 20.
demonstrate how monstrous female desire can be. Yet Williams has not taken into consideration that this look can be harnessed somehow – by pausing the film in the first moment of monstrosity, the still image of the feminine-monster in The Exorcist drawing becomes a pause in the temporal narrative and freezes her look, creating the potential for power. The subversion of narrative to create this potentiality will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

Freud talks about eyes in his essay *The Uncanny*. Among his etymological studies of *unheimlich*, Freud said that the uncanny that starts ‘from the homely and domestic, [unheimlich has a] a further development towards the notion of something removed from the eyes of strangers, hidden, secret.’ In the Sand-Man, the reference to eyes is relentless – the eponymous character tears out children’s eyes to feed them to his young, Coppelius threatens to remove Nathaniel’s eyes, Coppola is an optician who sells ‘lovely eyes’ (glasses) and creates the glass eyes of the automaton Olimpia. Freud sees the continuous connection to eyes as a reference to the castration complex:

The study of dreams, fantasies and myths has taught us ... that anxiety about one’s eyes, the fear of going blind, is quite often a substitute for the fear of castration. When the mythical criminal Oedipus blinds himself, this is merely a mitigated form of the penalty of castration, the only one that benefits him according to the *lex talionis* ['an eye for an eye' from the Bible].

Freud believes that this concept is the only way to make sense of The Sand-Man story, otherwise the tale becomes ‘arbitrary and meaningless if one rejects the relation between fear for the eyes and fear of castration.’ But what doesn’t equate to the castration complex in Freud’s psychoanalysis?! Psychoanalysis is decidedly based on castration. Barbara Creed writes that ‘the belief that woman’s genitals terrifies because her genitals appear castrated are central to the Freudian theory of the castration complex,’ but she believes that Freud could not see that there is a possibility that the genitals could be castrating, rather than castrated. Through an analysis of Freud’s writing on Medusa, dreams, and his treatment of Little Hans, Creed explores the fact that, in Freudian theory, the father becomes the threatening castrator, which

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276 ibid., p. 33.
277 Freud, *The Uncanny*, op. cit., p. 133.
278 ibid., p. 139.
279 ibid., p. 140.
subsequently explains the ‘patriarchal nature of the human order.’ But what if the mother/the feminine could be castrating? She presents the *Vagina Dentata* as such a case. Creed writes:

> Freud avoids confronting the possibility that man’s fear of sexual intercourse with woman is based on irrational fears about the deadly powers of the vagina, especially the bleeding vagina. Rather than consider man’s dread of the imaginary castrating woman, Freud takes refuge in his theory of woman’s castration. While he acknowledges that it is man’s ‘generalised dread of women’ that leads to the setting up of taboos, he concludes that dread has nothing to do with woman’s possible powers – real or imagined. Instead he explains man’s fears in terms of woman’s lack of power.

How odd. Freud seems to be so afraid of femininity that he has to renounce woman’s potential as soon as it is suggested. But the castrating female would readdress all the issues he had raised surrounding penis envy and the role of the father – he probably didn’t want to ‘damage his own theories’ or allow woman any power at all. However, the fetish remains stable in either castrating or castrated theories. The exchange for the phallus indicates a double substitution when the woman is castrating; Creed notes that the males wishes to disavow the *Vagina Dentata*, and substitutes a (Symbolic) penis in its place, in the wish that she is like him rather than having a monstrous vagina. In *The Exorcist* drawing, the eyes that ‘become the phallus’ are replaced through the licking, and what remains are vulva-shaped holes – bloody wounds that symbolise both the castrated penis and simultaneously the frightening *Vagina Dentata*. But because they are Regan’s eyes, they are feminine and supposedly passive and lacking, the layering of the blood on the paper disrupts the fetish and signifies a liminal space between the castrated and the castrating vagina. The presumed Freudian eye/phallus imbrication becomes eye/vagina, and subsequently subverts the traditional castration complex. Like in the film, Regan’s image becomes extremely frightening, and subsequently there is decidedly more to the drawing than meets the eye.

Moving towards a discussion of *The Lick Drawings* series as a whole, my process of selecting the images could be the key to deciphering the strange potential of the drawings; I began to analyze the reason for the particular stills that I took, capturing the two hours of a film into one image that I felt represented what I

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281 ibid., p. 159.  
282 ibid., p. 121.
found important in the film. Why did I pick this fleeting image over the thousands of other stills in the film? There could be up to 140,000 stills in one ninety-minute film alone. My main intention was to freeze and subvert the narrative; scanning through the film, I wanted the still to have the strength of image to be able to be both drawn and licked, while at the same time having the potential to be recognised if the audience was very in tune to horror, and most importantly to capture a moment that epitomised the frightening potential of the monstrousness that certain horror films suggest – it was not an easy task! I would propose that capturing the still image suggests Barthes’ punctum – finding the right image in the thousands of stills ‘is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me).’\(^{283}\) Barthes notes that this ‘partial object’ called the punctum, the word itself can be traced to the Greek for trauma, shoots like an arrow and wounds the viewer by making them realise the indexicality of the image, and it subsequently denotes death – ‘an abrupt dive into literal death.’\(^{284}\) Barthes’ punctum thus links to horror (of the Real) and becomes uncanny, because he defines it as not being able to be coded or defined in language (as I mentioned in Chapter One) – ‘what I can name cannot really prick me. The incapacity to name is a good symptom of disturbance.’\(^{285}\) Language cannot describe the punctum; for in fact, in terms of temporality, the only way to describe a photograph is ‘this was now.’ The punctum becomes a personal moment for the viewer (not necessarily for the photographer), evoking the sense of uncanny wound, the evanescent and fleeting moment in the image – my attempt to pick the ‘right’ stills from films became a personal experience in capturing what I personally felt contained a punctum. Yet, suggesting the punctum in terms of film may ring alarm bells, as Barthes believed that this connection to death (a melancholy moment without future) is never achieved in film – as cinema is ‘protensive,’ but I believe that the motionless image that is created by pausing and capturing a still frame freezes the potensity and allows the punctum to be revealed – and, in the drawings, I subsequently lick it away.

\(^{284}\) ibid., p. 92.
\(^{285}\) ibid., p. 51.
Similarly, Laura Mulvey is interested in this concept of pausing the narrative of film. In her most recent book *Death 24x a Second*, Mulvey believes that new digital technology has manipulated our way of viewing, and subsequently the nature of the cinematic experience changes. Like my process of stopping the film to capture the single image for the drawing, Mulvey is interested in the use of DVD players to subvert the fetishistic gaze through a radical breakdown of narrative, which returns to repetition compulsion. This re-examines and develops her *Visual Pleasure* essay, by discussing that the aesthetic pleasure of delayed cinema, via the pause button, moves more towards fetishistic scopophilia: ‘The fetishistic spectator becomes more fascinated by image than plot, returning compulsively to privileged moments, investing emotion and ‘visual pleasure’ in any slight gesture, a particular look or exchange taking place on the screen.’

Mulvey subsequently questions whether these new practices of spectatorship have ‘effectively erased the difficulty of sexual difference and the representation of gender in Hollywood cinema.’ She writes:

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286 Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second*, op.cit., p. 166.
With the weakening of character identification, vicarious control over the plot is replaced by another kind of power as the spectator gains immediate control over the image. No longer the driving force of the movie, the star succumbs to stillness and repetition. The desire for possession, only previously realized outside the film, in stills and pin-ups, can now be fulfilled not only in stillness but also in the repetition of movements, gestures, looks, actions.\(^\text{287}\)

Mulvey’s belief that there is a move towards fetishistic scopophilia, and subsequent loss of sadistic voyeurism, only accentuates the focus on the self-reflexive pleasure of the eye in horror; the control we have in the horror film allows us to feel that we have control in reality – it is a cathartic release that is craved in horror. If we can manipulate the imagery and plot of horror, we are creating ‘our own nightmares.’ I mentioned earlier about the use of fragmentation in relation to video, the process of (de)construction, or dissection of bodies in space, and also to the horror film, where ‘the lust of the eyes may turn into a panoramic-anatomic lust, leading our spectator into a curiosity for such things as mangled corpses.’ Here Mulvey evokes these ideas and shows us why the use of DVD players have moved us spectators towards images of the horrific. Not only does this connect to horror and suggests Barthes’ **punctum**, but also she believes that this process of experiencing film in this way creates a fragmented and disjointed (or lack of) narrative, which constructs a certain ‘feminized’ form or cinema. The subversion and feminisation of narrative will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Three with regards to video practices, but what stands out in terms of *The Lick Drawings* is that this new form of understanding cinema challenges the sadistic voyeurism that had previously been experienced in film. The horror of the looping or paused image, rather than the previously dominating narrative, confronts the controlling masculine agency, ‘undermining the male protagonist’s command over the action’\(^\text{288}\) and presents a potential to damage or subvert the concept of phallocentric fetish. To clarify, Mulvey believes that stillness and looping create uncanny movements; a fusion of life and death, similar to the automaton Olimpia in Hoffman’s *The Sand-Man*, that disturbs the fantasy of cinema and ‘wounds’ its integrity. Echoing the abject, Mulvey notes that this artificial body ‘is always too close to the mother’s body,’ and:

\(^{287}\) ibid., p. 171.
\(^{288}\) ibid., p. 165.
...this new way of looking emasculates the coherent whole of narrative structure, ‘wounding’ the surface. The figure of the automaton returns in a double sense, first as the site of castration anxiety, this time threatening the ‘body’ of the film itself, and secondly as a metaphor for a fragmented, even feminized, aesthetic of cinema.289

This female/maternal body of the uncanny and the abject, like the image of Mrs. Bates in Psycho, is translated into cinema and creates a powerful and frightening liminality.

This concept very obviously links to The Lick Drawings, their wounded surfaces, the automatic style of drawing, and their fragmented narrative that can be reanimated only through an uncanny memory of the film. Yet they transcend Mulvey’s theory; unlike the ‘inorganic trace of life’290 that she suggests in the repetition of film through DVD, they have been ‘touched’ by reality. In The Lick Drawings, the fleeting image on screen has been laboured over, traced and solidified onto the paper, and the saliva and blood firmly positions the physical corporeality of the female body back onto the surface of the ‘screen,’ literalizing the abject quality of both the image and the action.

And so, to conclude, my latest incarnation of the series, The Big Lick, explores the performativity and power of the action of licking. Creating the drawings, I project the film onto an extremely large piece of paper, approximately 2.4 x 3.6 m, and draw the image as with the smaller pieces. The size of line remains the same, so that there is both more detail, and simultaneously when viewed from a distance, the image itself becomes difficult to see in its entirety, and at certain angles the drawing appears blank at particular points. Drawing theorist Terry Rosenberg notes that parts of blankness in a drawing alludes to liminality, blank elements denote ‘thinking and acting between the not-yet-formed and the formed, in the space between form and form and at the threshold between form and anti-form.’291 Rather than complete the image in the studio, as I had done previously with The Lick Drawings, I allow the audience to view the experience of my, usually hidden, action of drawing. I am interested in the performativity of this technique of drawing; the dark room, how my body breaks up the projected image and distorts the light while trying to trace the

289 ibid., p. 179-180.
290 ibid., p. 175.
film still – it positions the female body back into the cinematic, not as ‘image’ but as an active and disruptive physical presence – but one that is frighteningly shrouded in shadow, dichotomously evoking an apparition.

Fig. 19. Jenny Keane, Nightmare on Elm Street from The Big Lick Series, 2011. Graphite, saliva and blood on Heritage paper, 2.4 x 3.6 m.

Unlike the smaller Lick Drawings, through the large scale that alludes to the cinematic, The Big Lick is a confrontation with the cinematic screen, going up to it and rupturing it, and at the same time asking the audience to do the same. It fragments the still image, that is already just a section of the film, into a picture so large that it cannot be seen as a whole, further fragmenting the frame and the film itself. Another layer of fragmentation occurs when I begin to lick. As I move around the image, my body hides parts of the drawing and the audience has to move around the gallery to experience the licking, evoking a bodily reaction in space. Unlike cinema, this movement makes the audience ‘recognise their embodied presence in the here and now of the exhibition space.’292 I will discuss the movement of the audience further in Chapter Three in relation to video installation, but it is enough to note here that my intention was that the moving audience subverts the traditional cinematic experience.

and simultaneously suggests a relationship between my body and theirs. This is reiterated in the performative nature of the licking; rather than implying the licking action through the title of the work, or using video documentation as I had done with The Lick Drawings, the performative action in the space creates a visceral and connected moment that literalises the sexual, sensual and abject experience. The piece alludes to life and death, and becomes both intimate and disgusting, masochistic and voyeuristic – a space that transgresses the fetishistic investment in the image of the feminine in cinema, fragments narrative, and subsequently repositions the female body. Furthermore, as I will discuss in the next chapter through the work of other artists, artworks like The Big Lick create a space of liminality.

Fig. 20. Jenny Keane, Nightmare on Elm Street from The Big Lick Series, 2011. Documentation of performance, Catalyst Arts, Belfast, 14th July 2011.
CHAPTER THREE

The Attic

Selma: You like the movies, don’t you?
Bill Houston: I love the movies. I just love the musicals.
Selma: But isn’t it annoying when they do the last song in the films?
Bill Houston: Why?
Selma: Because you just know when it goes really big... and the camera goes like out of the roof... and you just know it’s going to end. I hate that. I would leave just after the next to last song... and the film would just go on forever.293

DANCER IN THE DARK

Unfortunately for Selma, and ‘[u]nlike the photograph, cinema cannot but come to an end.’294 The unwritten law of the cinematic experience constructs a particular narrative that has to come to some form of finale, yet this chapter explores the issues of time and space in an attempt to examine the use of video installation to challenge the notions of linear filmic narrative. Rather than just manipulating narrative, which can be seen in many films and video art practices, the works of video artists discussed in this chapter, whether by installation, editing, or both, have created a new form of video viewing that does not fit within the typical constructions of narrative.295 Furthermore, as I

294 Mulvey, Death 24x a Second, op. cit., p. 83.
295 An early draft of this chapter has been published in Jenny Keane, ‘Fragmented Fetishes: Monstrosity and Desire in Women’s Contemporary Time-Based Art’, in Laura K. Davis and Cristina Santos (eds.), The Monster Imagined: Humanity’s Re-Creation of Monsters and Monstrosity, Inter-Disciplinary Press, Oxford, 2010. (Earlier edits were also presented at ‘Media Modes: At the Intersection of Art and Technology’ Conference, The School of Visual Arts (SVA), New York, 2009, and ‘Seventh Global Conference of Monsters and the Monstrous: Myths of Enduring Evil,’ Mansfield Hall, Oxford, 2009. The conference transcript was subsequently published in the eBook:
have discussed in the previous chapters, the issue of the female body as site/sight of the monstrous is paramount to the work of many video artists, and three contemporary art practices will be explored here. These artists investigate – through spatial and temporal subversion – the fragmentation of the body and manipulation of the tropes of horror films to evoke images of disgust, desire and femininity. The artists probe the liminal state of the aberrant, visceral female body through cultural representations within the horror film to subvert the way these films allow the spectator ‘to wallow vicariously in normally taboo forms of behaviour before restoring order’. The artists do not restore this order through narrative; rather than eschew the long-standing phallocentric perception of feminine monstrosity – the ‘lack’, these women artists appropriate and employ a transgressive mode of abject liminality to push the boundaries surrounding the fears and fascinations of sexual difference.

Time and Space

Julia Kristeva believes that ‘when evoking the name and destiny of woman, one thinks more of the space generating and forming the human species than of time, becoming or history.’ She continues by discussing that time becomes difficult in the attempt to construct female subjectivity; the forms that time take including ‘time as project, teleology, linear and prospective folding; time as departure, progression and arrival – in other words, the time of history’ which excludes the feminine. Furthermore, she notes that linear time is


297 To methodically explore the history of time and space theories would be very difficult to achieve in this thesis, but I do wish to mention some of the key points in relation to time and space. In his book A Brief History of Time, Stephen Hawking notes that before 1915, time and space were perceived as two infinite rigid concepts that were not affected by any events that took place in space, but due to research on the General Theory of Relativity, physics can now verify that space and time are now very variable and ‘dynamıc’ reciprocal quantities. He writes that: ‘When a body moves, or a force acts, it affects the curvature of space and time – and in turn the structure of space-time affects the way in which bodies move and forces act. Space and time not only affect but also are affected by everything that happens in the universe.’ Stephen Hawking, A Brief History of Time, Bantam Press, London, 2005, p. 48. Hawking explains that space and time becomes one unit, space-time which is quantified by (a minimum of) four dimensions – space taking up three dimensions (length, width and depth), and time becomes the fourth. While these theories of space-time are important to relativity, the practical use of it in terms of classical mechanics and experience are less suitable. But it is interesting to note the connection between the two previously separated concepts, as well as the variability of both.

299 ibid., p. 17.
language – it is the ‘enunciation of sentences (noun+verb; topic-comment, beginning-ending)’ and this temporality becomes death; the end of a sentence denotes the end of life. This thought alludes to Heidegger’s well known saying: ‘Mortals are they who can experience death as death. Animals cannot do so. But animals cannot speak either. The essential relation between death and language flashes up before us, but still remains unthought.’ Kristeva believes that ‘the most normal solution, commonplace and public at the same time, communicable, shareable, is and will be the narrative. Narrative as the recounting of suffering: fear, disgust, and abjection crying out, they quiet down [when] concatenated into a story.’ In other words, as Kristeva notes in Powers of Horror, linear narrative is a social structure to culturally dissolve abjection – and subsequently, as Kristeva infers, it is a way to diffuse, or ‘quiet down’ femininity.

Roland Barthes notes that time is a structural system of language that has been developed to organize society. Dealing with the past, the present, and the future, it becomes a form of personal or collective narrative:

Temporality is no more than a structural class of narrative, just as in ordinary language, time exists only in the form of a system. From the point of view of narrative, what we call time does not exist, or at least it only exists functionally, as an element of a semiotic system: time does not belong to discourse proper, but to the referent. Both narrative and language can only refer to semiological time; “true” time is only a referential illusion, “realistic”.

What Barthes doesn’t note, however, is that the systems of time and space, ultimately intangible, are structured in a binary, where masculinity, patriarchally ordered, is defined as time, and the feminine, unordered and unruly, is represented as space. Luce Irigaray writes that the masculine always receives the positive binary:

Everything, beginning with the way in which the subject has always been written in the masculine form, as man, even when it claimed to be universal or neutral. Despite the fact that man – at least in French – rather than being neutral, is sexed.

Thus, temporality is masculine and ‘feminine is experienced as space with

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connotations’, as Irigaray notes, ‘of the abyss and night.’\textsuperscript{304} If narrative is masculine, in a sense, to have a female narrative – of woman creating narratives or making history – is an oxymoron! Irigaray believes that the position of the feminine in the patriarchal order is forced into a ‘place’, it is the place of the family home, the position of the maternal, and the corporeal attributes of the vagina and the womb. Becoming place means becoming ‘thing.’ Yet, her ‘thingness’ or objectified otherness becomes inseparable from the construct of man, and when she breaks from him, by ‘distinguishing herself from both the envelope [the womb] and the thing, […] creating some interval, play, something in motion and un-limited,’\textsuperscript{305} this leads to the disruption of his subjectivity. But because of her lack of subjectivity by being placed as Other, man becomes a ‘slave to the power of the maternal-feminine which he diminishes or destroys.’\textsuperscript{306} In other words, man attempts to control woman by placing her, but her attempt to escape and form her own subjectivity within her otherness threatens him, so he needs to hold her as Other to define both her and himself.

This ‘thingness’ can be seen in the construction of the home, Irigaray notes that man buys her a place, a house, and ‘shuts her up in it,’ to be able to place a limit on her spatiality – these places are ‘the opposite of the unlimited site in which he unwittingly situates her.’\textsuperscript{307} As Griselda Pollock discusses, the nineteenth century man was defined by the public sphere, while women were positioned in the private. She quotes nineteenth century politician, Jules Simon: ‘What is man’s vocation? It is to be a good citizen. And woman’s? To be a good wife and a good mother. One is in some way called to the outside world, the other is retained for the interior.’\textsuperscript{308} This trap of the domestic has been a major issue in feminism, and was discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Two, but what is important here is the binary between space and time that has positioned women into space. The space of the domestic home becomes the metaphor for the feminine but is simultaneously depicted as monstrous or uncanny. The house itself is the space of the uncanny, as I mentioned in Chapter One, and femininity becomes the metaphor for this encroaching house and vice versa. Paul Wells’ quote mentioned previously, about the

\textsuperscript{304} ibid., p. 9.
\textsuperscript{305} ibid., p. 11.
\textsuperscript{306} ibid.
\textsuperscript{307} ibid., p. 12.
\textsuperscript{308} As quoted in Griselda Pollock, Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art, Routledge Classics, London, 2003, p. 95. (Pollock’s emphasis.)
domestic space being ‘the locality for the worst of horror,’suggests this, and Vivian Sobchack’s analysis of the difference between sci-fi and horror positions horror as less social than sci-fi, a more individualized problem. Sobchack believes that horror disturbs the family unit through ‘moral chaos,’ the ‘disruption of the natural order’ and a threat to the ‘harmony of hearth and home.’

In Elemental Passions, Irigaray writes:

Already inside and outside, I am continually divided between the two spheres of your space, and you never meet me as a whole. You never meet me. For these two which I have become no longer exist for you. ... Where am I? Nowhere. Disappeared forever in your presence.

Here femininity, controlled by place, becomes neither one thing or another. She is entirely uncanny, and simultaneously she is the abject ‘place where meaning collapses,’ the abyss. If, as irigaray positions, time is the ‘interiority of the subject’ and space being its exteriority, rather than the rigid and masculine structured form of narrative, femininity’s power lies in this liminal and ‘unlimited site’ of spatiality. Yet, as Elizabeth Mangini notes, the position of binary is a difficult one. In terms of artistic practice, a female artist must ‘transgress gender’ to avoid her ‘lack’ that is inherent in the phallic system. Mangini explicates:

She cannot merely appropriate the male position for her own, nor can she reject the other entirely, since the first underscores her own lack and the latter is essentializing. To take the opposite stance in a binary relationship is really to take the same side, since each is only known through relation to its opposite, and in delimiting the feminine as that which is not masculine, the woman is putting herself right back in the place of other.

Thus the process of overvaluing feminine spatial and monstrous connections would merely position the feminine back into the discourses of patriarchy. But the feminine, while constructed by monstrosity through history and because she is other, the ‘dark side’, can create liminal forms of monstrosity without reaffirming her otherness. The form of doubling by subverting the binary through

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liminality – to ‘deconstruct both [the feminine] sign and its other’\textsuperscript{314} – breaks through the walls of the phallocentric binary. Mladen Dolar notes that when binaries are blurred they can become horrifying:

One could say that traditional thought consisted of the constant effort to draw a clear line between the interior and the exterior. All the great philosophical conceptual pairs – essence/appearance, mind/body, subject/object, spirit/matter, etc. – can be seen as just so many transcriptions of the division between interiority and exteriority. Now the dimension of extimité blurs this line. It points neither to the interior nor to the exterior, but is located there where the most intimate interiority coincides with the exterior and becomes threatening, provoking horror and anxiety. The extimate is simultaneously the intimate kernel and the foreign body; in a word, it is unheimlich.\textsuperscript{315}

Eximacy was coined by Lacan to address the issue of the binary between inside and outside. Dana Arnold and Margaret Iverson note that ‘Extimate is not the opposite of intimate. It is the Lacanian term generated to explain those psychic phenomena that defy the inside/outside, self/other boundary and are thus both exterior and intimate at the same time.’ They expand the explanation by saying: ‘Extimité is connected with Lacan’s theory of objet a which is a trace in the psyche of that from which the subject has been cut away, like a negative shadow. It is thus the otherside of the subject, foreign and removed yet encapsulated within the psyche’s most fundamental recesses.’\textsuperscript{316} Thus Lacan’s extimate is Freud’s uncanny, but its neological amalgamation – ‘exterior-intimacy’ – possibly defines the uncanny more succinctly than Freud’s essay ever could. It is the blending of two extreme states, a horrifying liminality that pushes the boundaries of subjectivity to – and beyond – its limits. It is this site, this in-betweenness, that I believe women video installation artists achieve.

\textbf{Video Installation}

Video installation practices utilize the relationship between time and space in a very different quality to the constructs of the cinematic; as mentioned in Chapter Two, women artists have used single-channel video art as a means of

\textsuperscript{314} ibid., p. 4.
\textsuperscript{315} Mladen Dolar, “‘I Shall Be with You on Your Wedding-Night....’” op. cit., p. 6.
expression because it was not contingent on a masculine history, yet the analysis of video installation practices by women artists have not been thoroughly discussed by theorists. The space-time binary, challenged as well as it can be in two-dimensional video art, now can be explored and confronted in an expanded form in the site of the video installation.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, cinema has a restrictive temporality, and spatiality is superseded by narrative, as Stephen Heath notes: ‘The fiction film disrespects space in order to construct a unity that will bind spectator and film in its fiction’ – a fiction that keeps the spectator passive within the narrative. Elizabeth Freeman, author of Time Binds, writes that film depends on a concept of social and collective temporal experience that needs to be challenged to subvert fetishism (both the Freudian fetish and the commodity fetish, as I shall discuss later) – the film itself as a cultural product developed in the era of industrial capitalism, which relies on Guy Debord’s concept of the spectacle. Debord writes that the spectacle is ‘an affirmation of appearances and an identification of all human life with appearances.’ In a capitalist industry, mass cinema appropriated the assembly line and other forms of ‘rationalized time-space’, which brought about the concept of ‘organized leisure time.’ This previously undeveloped notion expanded and segregated workers’ time – work hours versus non-work hours – to create the structure of film that has a standard time and narrative, with a maximum two-hour-long feature. Freeman notes that ‘film, then, creates a historically specific shared temporality, setting limits on how long a spectator can dwell on any one object or experience any one story, and thus socializing the gaze.’ This socializing supplants the real physical connections with people and invokes the spectacle. In time-based work, how do we avoid the inauthentic spectacle of cinema?

We have to be aware of the three forms that space takes in the cinematic situation. Mary Ann Doane notes that the first element is the space of the diegesis, and this space is constructed by the film and has no physical limits but represented through the audio and visual qualities of the image. The second spatial element is the screen itself, the physical space as a ‘receptor of

319 Freeman, Time Binds, op. cit., p. xviii.
The third is the physical space of the cinematic room. This space should be visible but is darkened so that the projected screen is the main focus. Doane notes that the third space is not ‘framed’ in the same way as the projected image, instead it ‘envelops the spectator.’ The physical space of the auditorium or theatre is never explored, but rather it is ignored so that the audience is assimilated into the cinematic spectacle. These spaces are specific to the audience and the characters on screen are generally only aware of the first space. As I will discuss, transgressions of one or more of these three ‘spaces’ become some of the ways contemporary video installation artists undermine the cinematic.

Video installation is clearly a subversion of the cinematic experience. It can take many forms, including multiple screens, looping, manipulation of cinematic screen formats, spatial installation, but its main action is a focus on a simultaneously temporal and spatial experience – which blurs spatio-temporal binaries, confuses reality and fiction, and exposes ‘the mechanisms of illusion.’ As Kate Mondloch notes, they are ‘meant to be experienced as activated spaces rather than as discrete objects: they are designed to “unfold” during the spectator’s experience in time rather than to be known visually all at once.’ Similarly, Julie Reiss believes:

The essence of installation art is spectator participation. ... Participation can mean offering the viewer specific activities. It can also mean demanding that the viewer walk through the space and simply confront what is there. ... In each of these situations, the viewer is required to complete the piece; the meaning evolves from the interaction between the two.

In essence, video installation explores the relationship between the viewer and their bodily movement. Margaret Morse notes that ‘the underlying premise of the [video] installation appears to be that the audiovisual experience supplemented kinesthetically can be a kind of learning not with the mind

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321 Ibid., p. 339. (Emphasis in original.)
323 Mondloch, Screens, op. cit., p. xiii.
324 Julie H. Reiss, From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art, MIT Press, Massachusetts, 2001, p. xiii.
alone, but with the body itself. As mentioned before, film restrains the audience in one position while the narrative creates the pseudo-motion, but video installation provides a spatio-temporality, and is designed to induce a physical movement of the body to complete the work, which disallows any passive spectatoral position. This active spectator, as I will discuss throughout the chapter, can destroy the fetishistic qualities of the cinematic. Furthermore, as I shall explore through the work of three video installation artists, the relationships between the body, space, and time positions the spectator in a very different arrangement in relation to the monstrous-feminine seen in horror films.

**Chloe Piene**

I was drawn to Chloe Piene’s *Blackmouth* (2004) by the sound – a guttural, masculine and almost sexual moaning. A door, slightly ajar, permitted me to capture a glimpse of the dark projection installed in a fire-exit stairs of New York’s PS1 gallery. The projector had been positioned by a bracket above the door, and was projecting onto the dividing wall of a double flight staircase. No seats were provided, and the audience either sat on the concrete descending steps, or leaned on the industrial chrome railing.

The video itself is short, the background is black, and the static camera reveals hints of trees and the muddied ground of a forest. The low level lighting focuses solely on a pair of dirty feet, slowly revealing the main protagonist – a young girl presented in rich chiaroscuro, dressed in a muddy vest and knickers. The girl is jumping and rolling around in the earth, covered in dirt and leaves. She seems to be presented in reverse and slow motion, inexplicably groaning and writhing in the mud; her long hair is wet and stuck to her body with perspiration and dirt. As she moves around, shaking her head, her hair wraps around her body, sometimes covering the screaming and muddied face. The audience realizes that the masculine moaning is paradoxically emanating from this young girl, and, as she leaves the shot, only the sound of her voice remains on the black screen. She reappears for a moment, now standing and running.

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from one side of the screen to the other, and disappears as quickly as she had arrived. As the audience watches, she appears in shot again, falls to her knees, growling, bearing her sharp teeth and begins to scream like an animal, in a mechanical slow motion sound which causes the voice to be piercingly deep and powerful; her mouth opens wide – wider than physically possible – into a dark, cavernous and gaping hole, strangely much darker than the surrounding blackness. She then falls back on the dirty ground again, and the ‘normality’ of the situation returns. Through subtle editing, the sequence is seamlessly looped.

Fig. 21. Chloe Piene, Blackmouth, 2004. Single channel video, 2:51 mins (looped), video still.

Like my practice, both video and drawing are utilized in Piene’s art. Born in Connecticut in 1972, and based in New York, her work deals with representations of death, fear and the monstrous. Piene explicitly references horror, she describes her work as straddling the line ‘between the erotic and the forensic’, alongside a confrontation between otherness, sexuality, and desire. Generally the drawings are self-portrait based, fusing images of her naked body (sometimes performing actions such as onanism, as in her well-known drawing entitled Mmasturbator, Charcoal on vellum, 2003) alongside

depictions of skulls, skeletons and exposed bone or muscle that are reminiscent of anatomy books. As I have mentioned in Chapter Two, the study of anatomy is central to the issues surrounding sexuality in the cinema, or as Giuliana Bruno suggests, cinema and anatomy are ‘discourse[s] of investigation and the fragmentation of the body.’

Piene’s video works explore these issues further – the bodies presented in her work are fragmented, but through their dissection, I believe a new sense of feminine space, powerfully ‘unlimited’, is created. Piene states that ‘it’s like stripping off all the extra stuff and just leaving the climax standing there, bare - because that’s the part that interests me.’

Through an analysis of Blackmouth we can see how.

If, as Margaret Morse notes, all installation art is interactive because ‘the visitor chooses a trajectory among all the possibilities’ and the trajectory becomes a ‘variable narrative simultaneously embodied and constructed at the level of presentation,’ what does Piene’s installation of Blackmouth in PS1 do to the audience and simultaneously to the video’s reception itself? Being a single channel video, with Piene’s only instructions on its installation to be a large projection with good quality sound, the PS1 installation may not have been the artist’s preferred, or rather, envisioned type of presentation. Yet, what the stairs install has achieved is a state of liminality that embeds itself in the experiential viewing and concurrently increases the spatial expressions of the video too. As Morse discusses, video installation is exclusively understood when it is exhibited. She writes:

While a installation can be diagrammed, photographed, videotaped, or described in language, its crucial element is ultimately missing from any such two-dimensional construction, that is, “the space-in-between,” or the actual construction of a passage for bodies or figures in space and time. Indeed, I would argue, the part that collapses whenever the installation isn’t installed is the art.

How does the video and its installation relate to each other in this piece? And what would be missing in viewing it on, say, a monitor or small screen? I wish to

328 Bruno, Public Intimacy, op.cit., p. 93.
331 As requested in my curated exhibition, Dark Waters, which will be discussed further in Interim Three.
explore the temporal element of the video – and its relation to cinema – to answer this. But rather than focusing solely on the narrative of the projection, I will explore its relation to the installation, because, as Alexander Alberro notes:

The formal aspects of exhibition and transmission significantly affect and inform a work of art’s meaning. More often than not, however, in discussions of audio-visual work these differences are overlooked in favour of content-based analysis. ... Because of an all-too-common lack of knowledge on the part of the writer, ... what is left is the narrative.333

The filmic technique of ‘suture’, discussed by Heath, Alain Miller, Kaja Silverman, and other film theorists, is the equivalent of language or ‘grammar’ for the cinematic image, it is the use of ‘cuts,’ ‘panning shots,’ and ‘close-ups’ that creates a visual language of film that generally ensures a smooth and linear narrative. Because we are not given entire power to experience the imagery on the screen, because a ‘shot’ provides us with only what is in that particular frame and nothing else, as I discussed in Chapter Two, Kaja Silverman believes that cinematic language is based on fetishistic lack. She writes:

A complex signifying chain is introduced in place of the lack which can never be made good, suturing over the wound of castration with narrative. However it is only by inflicting the wound to begin with that the viewing subject can be made to want the restorative of meaning and narrative.334

We try to ignore the fetishistic ‘wound’ of the lack of power by firstly acknowledging the wound and then allowing the narrative to cover the wound in an immersive fiction that must be believed in – ‘I know, but all the same.’ The spectator must create their own scenarios within the fragmented image to cover the lack and create a whole, while simultaneously being passive to the images on screen. In Blackmouth there is literally no sense of suspended disbelief, the cuts of the video presents images of the young girl, sometimes standing, sometimes kneeling, and other times sitting – the video becomes entirely fragmented. As Silverman notes, the process of suture is tied up in filmic narrative through the feminine body, and therefore the processes of cinematic narrative must be dissolved to make way for an active viewer that is aware of, but not passive to, the feminized spectacle. How then can the immersive narrative that locates the feminine in the position of lack be renounced? While

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334 Silverman, The Subject of Semiotics, op. cit., p. 221.
the expectation of narrative is present in *Blackmouth*, as in all temporal work. Piene explores the female body but completely denies suture techniques and heightens cinema’s splintering quality to its ultimate conclusion – darkness and absence.

![Image](image_url)

*Fig. 22.* Chloe Piene, *Blackmouth*, 2004. Single channel video, 2:51 mins (looped), video still.

Darkness is seen as the infinite, it is of space and a lack of light. The surrounding blackness that the girl in *Blackmouth* is regularly enveloped into suggests that this dark environment is hers; she is ‘one’ with it – even her white vest is dirtied by the intruding blackness. This darkness in both the temporal element and the installation hints at Irigaray’s unlimited space – through Piene’s use of sound, the girl is constantly present in the darkness, even when we cannot see her, she merely allows herself to be illuminated for us to view her at certain stages throughout the video. This is verified when she opens her mouth to reveal the infinite darkness within her, and the mouth, being a liminal space itself – as discussed by Bakhtin – further accentuate her omnipotence in the darkened environment. The grotesque can be reduced to the gaping mouth; encasing the ‘wide-open bodily abyss.’

335 See Chapter One for Bakhtin’s discussion of the mouth in the grotesque.
position on the stairs, heightens the ind differentiation between the video’s physical and representational quality – the position of the projection at the intersection of the stairs presents a form of portal into the darkness that the audience can enter. Sally O’Reilly notes that ‘the refutation of narrative or illusion presents us with a blankness in which we can better discern a reflection of our own state of mind and body.’ Unlike viewing the video in any other format, the image relies on scale to accentuate its (lack of) threshold, and the stairs is an unsettling liminal space, not meant to be inhabited but created for moving from one place to another. Imbricated, the entire video installation thus creates an entry into a sense of alternative space and time – one that is ‘unlimited’ and feminine. As Tamara Trodd notes, ‘the doubled, rhythmic pulse of light illuminating ... in the dark is like a heartbeat, and so is carnal. The darkened space ... is recast as a bodily, perhaps womb-like interior.

Within the video itself, one of the most powerful images is the smirk of the young girl after she completes her impossible mouth stretch (see Fig. 22). As her large mouth closes, she stares directly at the camera and smiles menacingly at us, the audience. This almost imperceptible laugh fades out just before it becomes hysterical, but the protagonist’s awareness of the audience subverts the fourth wall in a form of ‘verfremdungseffekt,’ or ‘estrangement effect,’ and creates a space for the individual spectator to be able to be active and aware of the fetishistic and soporific quality of narrative. Furthermore, the laugh positions the concept of fetish into the masculine. Kathleen Rowe, in her book The Unruly Woman (1995), sees the laughing woman as ‘a powerful means of self-definition and a weapon for feminist appropriation.’ Rowe’s concept of the ‘unruly woman’ is associated with beauty and monstrosity, and ‘dwells close to the grotesque.’ Bakhtin’s ‘laughing hags’, unquestioned by him as to why they were laughing, is explored by Rowe in an attempt to examine its

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339 One of the founding ways of calling attention to the structures of immersive and passive identification in the arts is Bertolt Brecht’s development of ‘Verfremdungseffekt.’ Meant as a technique in the theatre, Brecht’s concept and theatrical practice was an attempt to provoke a reaction in the audience and make them aware that the play was only a representation of reality. While his views were mainly from a political and Marxist position whereby Brechtian theatre became a stage for political ideas, the concept of disallowing the passive spectator presented an alternative way of viewing any artistic practice. Brechtian distanciation/estrangement in cinema and theatre uses processes such as breaking the ‘fourth wall,’ speaking stage directions, and singing to disturb the narrative flow.
340 Kathleen Rowe, The Unruly Woman, op. cit., p. 3.
341 Ibid., p. 11.
transgression. In her analysis, she quotes Irigaray who says: ‘Isn’t laughter the first form of liberation from a secular oppression? Isn’t the phallic tantamount to the seriousness of meaning? Perhaps woman, and the sexual relation, transcend it first in laughter?’ The act of laughter, opposite to the organized and serious patriarchal culture, can be a way of exploring the position of femininity – Rowe sees it as women laughing with each other ‘to take control of the visual’, as opposed to laughing at each other – a man viewing women laughing together, being excluded from their joke, can be as frightening as him seeing their ‘monstrosity’. This use of laughter evokes Cixous famously over-used quote about Medusa: ‘You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she’s not deadly. She’s beautiful and she’s laughing.’

While written in 1976, and quoted incessantly, Cixous’ Laugh of the Medusa is very important in suggesting not only the power in women’s collective laughter, but also the fact that fetishism is precisely a masculine issue, in other words, as Kaja Silverman notes, the fetish cannot affect the feminine ‘since the female subject is constructed through an identification with dispossession, her exposure to further castrations jeopardises nothing.’ Women’s laughter, like her monstrosity, is an excess that cannot be restrained by patriarchy, and the tiny sequence in Blackmouth expresses this forcefully. The girl’s laugh is a knowing laugh, directed at us. Powerfully telling, I believe it positions the girl as conspirator in the knowledge that the imagery does not affect the feminine – and in breaking down the filmic fetish, the masculine is her victim.

How does this issue of fetish relate to the concept of female monstrosity? In her book Fetishism and Curiosity, Mulvey states that glossy images of women in magazines that produce ‘flawless icons of femininity’ are a symptom of this fetishistic disavowal of castration, they ‘mask the sight of the wound, covering the lack with beauty’. Yet, she believes that in the horror genre, the fetish:

...can crack open to reveal its binary opposition when, for instance, a beautiful vampire disintegrates into ancient slime. (…) When the exterior carapace of feminine beauty collapses to reveal the uncanny, abject, maternal body it is as though the fetish itself has failed.

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342 Cited in ibid., p. 1.
344 Silverman, The Acoustic Mirror, op. cit., p. 27.
Thus, as I have mentioned in Chapter Two, there is a potential in the techniques of the horror genre to challenge the fetish by a form of reappropriation of the abject, and Piene’s Blackmouth epitomizes the issues of abjection. In terms of film, Judith Halberstam also notes that cinema must make the sutures invisible to suspend our disbelief, but the horror film constantly tries to ‘call our attention to cinematic production, its failures and excesses.’ She believes that horror ‘is a critical genre and one that exposes the theatricality of identity because it makes specular precisely those images of loss, lack, penetration, violence that other films attempt to cover up.’\(^{346}\) But at the same time, the horror film generally relies on the mutilation of the female body to expose the suture. Parallel to the well-documented discussions on pornography, horror has been an object of feminist criticism because many women writers perceive the horror film as a negative representation of the feminine. For example, films such as the ‘slasher’ films of the Seventies and Eighties were considered to promote violence against women by ‘staging the spectacle of the ruined female body.’\(^{347}\) Halberstam writes that in written stories and Gothic novels, ‘the reader can only imagine the dreadful spectacle of the monster and so its monstrosity is limited only by the reader’s imagination,’ but she believes that the horror film monster will ‘always fail to be monstrous enough and horror therefore depends upon the explicit violation of female bodies as opposed to simply the sight of the monster.’\(^{348}\) Chloe Piene’s practice is based on the issues of the feminine in horror, yet there is something more fundamental than simply the violation of the female body. Through the impossible action of the child’s mouth, I believe that Blackmouth endeavours to represent a space of unassimilable abjection – a liminality, ‘the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.’\(^{349}\) Firstly, the monstrosity of the protagonist’s crawling and animalistic sexuality alludes to abjection, as ‘the abject confronts us (...) with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of animal.’\(^{350}\) Secondly, the lack of verbal language evokes the pre-Symbolic state in the development of the abject, and finally, the unnaturally large mouth subverts reality. The image of the girl in Piene’s video seems to be a very specific representation of a liminal space, which, as I


\(^{348}\) Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, op. cit., p. 3.


\(^{350}\) ibid., p. 12.
mentioned earlier, is duplicated by the stairs installation. But her body is also liminal, she is between childhood and adolescence, and by the contortions of her young body, she is the embodiment of the female monster. In an attempt to analyze the connection between monstrosity and femininity, Linda Williams speaks about the sexual difference of the (horror film) monster from the normal male in terms of ‘a frightening potency precisely where the normal male would perceive a lack.’\textsuperscript{351} In terms of this monstrosity, Piene discusses her fascination with horror monsters that demonstrate ‘extreme physical dexterity.’\textsuperscript{352} Discussing the film \textit{The Ring 2} (Hideo Nakata, 2005), Piene believes that the most important scene in the film is when the monstrous girl climbs out of the well, as the director uses special effects to distort and disrupt the movement of the body. ‘You’re not supposed to crawl like that,’\textsuperscript{353} she states. In an interview with me, she discusses that she has ‘always been drawn to the two poles – beauty and repulsion. They go together they both pull or push away. They are forceful.’\textsuperscript{354} These monstrous moments by female protagonists are what inspire her practice – a subversion of reality and illusion that dissolves the abjected boundaries between human and non-human.

In the film \textit{The Exorcist}, the masculine voice of the possessed Regan is actually made by a woman, but like the girl in \textit{Blackmouth} it is also perceived as male, as it is deep and overtly sexual. Discussing the sound of Regan’s masculine demonic voice, Barbara Creed believes that Regan’s body is ‘a body in revolt,’ ‘[t]he film’s rhythms and use of sounds and language, particularly Regan’s snarling, grunting voice, exert a disturbing and powerful effect almost as if the film’s semiotic [female] voice had overpowered its symbolic [male] one.’\textsuperscript{355} The voices of both adolescent protagonists are examples of the transgression of the borders between inside and outside, masculine and feminine, self and other. It is ‘what does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous.’\textsuperscript{356} Simultaneously, the slippages of language in \textit{Blackmouth} present a metaphor for the breakdown of the filmic language invested in narrative. Like Regan, Piene’s video’s deep ‘semiotic sounds’ represents the relationship between femininity and language. To quote Rosalind Minsky:

\textsuperscript{351} Williams, ‘When the Woman Looks,’ op. cit., p. 20.
\textsuperscript{352} Hilarie M. Sheets, ‘Making Skin Crawl’, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{353} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{354} Chloe Piene in conversation with Jenny Keane, email, 28\textsuperscript{th} May 2009.
\textsuperscript{355} Creed, \textit{The Monstrous-Feminine}, op. cit., p. 40.
\textsuperscript{356} Kristeva, \textit{Powers of Horror}, op. cit., p. 4.
Woman has no existence outside language, and even within language she can represent only the ‘lack’, the negative, ‘not man’, precisely what man must never be. She has no existence or destiny of her own. She exists in language only in relation to the male sign, as what man is not, as the negative end of the binary opposition: of masculinity/femininity. (...) She is man’s shadow, the one who carries the ‘dark’, repressed side of his nature, ‘his lack’.  

But rather than merely continuing the negative perception of feminine-as-abject, by presenting the female as only disgusting in its physical form of unclean, repetitious and unchangeable, and inarticulate through the absence of coherent language, Piene challenges horror’s spectacle of the feminine and presents the impossibility of the body – through its unlimited space and the overachieving mouth – as the real site of the feminine as sexual difference.

It is the physical transcendence of the body that reveals the abject here, and the action of the mouth also evokes the multivalent, as it is presented as a metaphor for sexuality, language, and the site of the boundaries between inside and outside. If horror is ‘a “ritual” of purification that permits the spectator to wallow vicariously in normally taboo forms of behaviour before restoring order,’ Piene’s Blackmouth presents the feminine as abject and monstrous, but before it can be restored through narrative, the abject is doubled via the overextended mouth that reaches beyond itself – into the space of the installation – so as to disallow its ‘ejection’. The body of the young girl is positioned spatially, through the use of blackness within the installation her grotesque and abject body envelops; she surrounds the audience with her corporeality. By constantly challenging the structures of the horror film narrative and simultaneously presenting the monstrous feminine physically through an impossible enveloping of space and time, Blackmouth speaks of the powerful and fearful potential of liminality against the structures of phallocentric binaries.

**Mika Rottenberg**

Mika Rottenberg’s video installation, entitled Mary’s Cherries (2005), is a prime example of the artist’s fascination with the relationship between the female

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body and mass production. Rottenberg, an artist originally from Argentina but living in New York, is known for her humorous way of creating and installing videos, and, like Chloe Piene, her practice deals with extreme and monstrous bodies, although in a very different way. Her protagonists come from varying professions, including ballet dancers, bakers, and wrestlers, and include the more excessive forms of bodily difference – morbidly obese ‘squashers’, body builders, and women with exceptionally long hair. Rottenberg’s only criteria is that her protagonists must be female and physically ‘different’ from the ‘norm’ – in the videos these women are corporeally explored as monstrous objects of ‘desire and exploitation’.360

Fig. 23. Mika Rottenberg, Mary’s Cherries, 2005. Single channel video installation, 5:49 mins (looped), four video stills.

From 2005, Rottenberg’s Mary’s Cherries is an early example of her work. Its installation is relatively simple in comparison to her newer pieces, but I

359 A ‘squasher’ is an overweight person who gets paid to lie on customers as a form of sexual fetish.
believe it encapsulates the relationship between temporal and spatial as well as, if not better than, her later works. The video is contained in a small claustrophobic room covered in textured plaster; as you can see from Fig. 23, the technique is that of ceiling texturizing (albeit in an enlarged form) so subsequently the space engulfs the audience with irregular plaster ‘talons’ protruding from the walls. This simple act, which relocates the ‘ceiling’ so that it surrounds and envelops, positions the spectator in an already unfamiliar environment, which in some ways elevates the audience into a position of floating. The video itself reiterates this texturizing on the walls within the set, so that the room of the installation is echoed in the room of the video, which implies a mirroring effect. Another layer of mirroring is that the powerful bird-of-prey like ‘talons’ are evoked in the action on screen, as a woman with her hands under a ‘blacklight’ grows her frighteningly long, red, curving fingernails at high speed. This action which is obviously created using a still frame via a very crudely ‘photoshopped’ process of photographic animation, is the beginning of a long chain of events. Once the woman, who we later discover is the eponymous Mary, has grown her nails, she cuts them off individually and drops them into a hole in her work-desk. This hole leads down to an almost identical room below, in which another woman wearing a similar overall but with the name ‘Barbara’ embroidered on the front, pounds the nails into mush using her fist. This red pulp is also sent down a hole on her desk to the waiting woman below, where the final woman, Rose, moulds and rolls the fragmented fingernail into a round ball. This small red sphere is placed into a punnet that is seemingly filled with glacé cherries, but in fact contains previously crushed nails.

The images repeat, but not in the sense of a DVD loop – some of the images are redisplayed, while other imagery is inserted to create a disjointed sense of repetition. It becomes less about the ‘narrative’ of the video – the process of creating the cherries – and more about the personalities, the little movements, and the monotonous lives of the three women working in such a repetitive environment. The tradition of the impersonal production line is called into question here, exploring the erasure of worker’s labour as value – the Marxist commodity fetish.

The main issue to be addressed in this installation is the sense of constant repetition. The installation itself is very simple, the four walls are covered with the plaster and the small (back-projected) screen is positioned on the wall opposite the entrance. It is important to note that due to the back projection, the space
of the installation is not darkened like Piene’s *Blackmouth*, but through the reiteration of the physical walls and the set’s walls, similar to *Blackmouth*, the audience sees that there is a connection between the space of the installation and the space of the video. The seat is made from painted wood, analogous to the construction of the seats in the video itself, and the carpet is also similar. In fact, Rottenberg likes to use the same materials from the set in the construction of her installations, so it is likely that the walls, carpet and wood are uncannily physically present in both the room and the video. As the installation room spatially mirrors the room on screen, the room(s) in the diegesis eventually reveals that they are not a series of vertically connecting rooms, but a single room that has been edited to create a sense of movement between them. This realization creates an incredulous quality to the scene on screen. The repetition of the room in the video, while reconfirming and/or revealing that the audience is standing in the same space (the only space), creates a sense of the uncanny, which becomes familiar yet strange. Simultaneously, the awareness of the set repetition, like Piene’s video, hints at Brechtian estrangement – the imbrication reveals the *representation* and subsequently (intentionally) fractures the suture created by Rottenberg’s editing. Through the close-ups of the women’s bodies, the focus of being in the room while watching the room in its many personas re-invigorates the idea of the body in/as space - the room itself, and the actions within it, presents the metaphor for the spatio-corporeality of the feminine.

To reiterate this spatial female body, I wish to refer to Sue Best in her essay *Sexualizing Space*. She notes that the general use of the body as a metaphor points to an act of desire to denote a rigid boundary due to the universal quality of corporeality, yet it is very clear that ‘when the body is invoked, [...] the boundary is probably most uncertain.’ Best continues by commenting on Henri Lefebvre’s use of the bodily metaphor, particularly the way in which he positions space in the female body. Lefebvre writes: ‘The ways in which space is [...] carved up are reminiscent of the ways in which the body is cut into pieces in images (especially the female body, which is not only cut up but also deemed to be ‘without organs’!).’ In her essay, Best explores the concept of ‘metaphor’ itself, and its relation to the continuing metaphorizing of the ‘feminine’ with ‘space’. Using examples of countries, places, cities, and

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mother-tongues, all personified as female, she pinpoints the idea of dwelling as the most extreme example – that of the world, Mother Earth, but also simultaneously the house, the homely – which both represent the figure of the maternal. We return again to Freud’s uncanny female body as site of ‘our first home.’ Best’s position is that the construction of the female/space metaphor is so long standing, its first mention being in Plato’s discussion of the chora363 in Timaeus, that the term ‘female’ has become spatialized, and ‘space’ is now feminized, as I discussed regarding Irigaray. Best writes:

Feminizing space seems to suggest, on the one hand, the production of a safe, familiar, clearly defined entity, which, because it is female, should be appropriately docile or able to be dominated. But, on the other hand, this very same production underscores an anxiety about this ‘entity’ and the precariousness of its boundedness.364

Even though the feminine is perceived as spatial as opposed to temporal, her presence within this unbounded space positions her, like the body itself, as ‘threaten[ing] and precarious.’365

This anxiety can be seen in the production of all video installation itself. Kate Mondloch writes that certain installations ‘disrupt illusionistic space by calling attention to the “real” space of the projective situation.’366 In this sense, video installation is itself uncanny. As Mondloch notes, it affects spatial and temporal dynamics because the viewers are ‘both “here” (embodied subjects in the material exhibition space) and “there” (observers looking onto screen spaces) in the here and now.’367 This creates an uncanny doubling, a new ‘double spatial dynamic, staged as a bodily encounter in real time.’368 Yet Rottenberg’s piece creates another layer of uncanny through the use of the set as the installation – the ‘here’ was ‘there’ then but it is ‘here’ now, and I’m in it. A double-double spatial dynamic, or should that be triple or quadruple? Either way, its uncanny concatenation provides a very uncomfortable form of

363 It is interesting to note here that Plato’s chora is the same chora that Kristeva discusses, as mentioned in Chapter One. Plato describes the chora as: ‘[Always being] called the same because it never alters its characteristics. For it continues to receive all things, and never itself takes a permanent impress from any other thing that enters it, making it appear different at different times. And the things which pass in and out of it are copies of the eternal realities, whose form they take ... we must make a threefold distinction and think of that which becomes, that in which it becomes, and the model which it resembles. We may indeed use the metaphor of birth and compare the receptacle to the mother, the model to the father, and what they produce between them to their offspring.’ Cited in Sue Best, ‘Sexualizing Space’, op. cit., p. 184.
364 Ibid., p. 183.
365 Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger, op. cit., p. 142.
366 Kate Mondloch, Screens, op. cit., p. 61.
367 Ibid., p. 62.
368 Ibid.
repetition. If in cinema, the screen is ‘conceptually, though not literally, distinct from the viewer’s material space,’ Rottenberg’s use of the screen built into the stylized walls that repeat in the video changes its lack of physicality. Rather than allow the screen to be the sole focus, the walls ground the virtual space of the video and its screen into material reality. So while the audience can enjoy the imagery on the screen, they will always be constantly aware of the installation and must ‘recognise their embodied presence in the here and now of the exhibition space.’

Yet, Tanya Leighton questions the use of embodiment in installation, as she believes they could sidetrack the video itself rather than make you aware of the immersive and fetishistic quality of the cinematic, it can just distract you from the temporality itself. She asks: ‘How can moving-image installations distract from distraction without simply reproducing distraction, and how can they retain their criticality by provoking attention to distraction without falling prey to contemplative immersion?’ One answer can be seen in Rottenberg’s installation. Her duplication of the installation that positions the visitor within the video expresses a criticality that can both challenge the passive spectator position and allow the viewer to be aware of their immersion – while simultaneously engaging with the temporal video. The use of camera motion within the video that illustrates the visitors’ movement (either physical or optical) around the space engages the spectator, in Leighton’s words, in ‘new reflective rhythms of absorption and distraction.’ It is a form of corporeal apperception. Similarly, Morse notes that the repetition of images makes the relationship between image and corporeality in the installation even more important; it becomes a form of choreography that the audience experiences:

\[\text{I have come to think of \[the\] possibility for repetition, contrast, and migration of images across a shape as a poetic dimension of video installation; that is, it is a practice that deemphasises the content of images in favour of such properties of line, colour, and vectors of motion, with content of their own to convey. The choreography of these properties is another kinaesthetic dimension of transformation.}\]

369 ibid., p. 63.
370 ibid., p. 74.
372 ibid., p. 31.
Rottenberg’s use of the body in relation to the repeated images – the wooden constructions juxtaposed against the women’s cellulite-dappled skin, or the sensual panning across the work benches and walls – creates a form of movement that, in a sense, transfers to the audience through the placement of these objects in the installation. The physical space can be mapped by the visitor, who can move around the room and note its shoddy (re)construction from its previous life as the video’s set. Like Piene’s Blackmouth, this rhythmic movement can be seen throughout the video itself, as Kirsten Swenson notes: ‘The video conflates the repetitive rhythms of human labour with the relentless push of machinery to underscore the maintenance and manipulation of women’s bodies as a core concern.’

Another rhythm can be seen in the protagonists’ repetitive calls to each other – “ROSE”, “Mary?” – yet the characters’ use of their voices articulates their independence from the production line, they become active and autonomous from their roles within the system. Their voices embody and corporealize, as Mary Ann Doane notes in The Voice in the Cinema, the voice ‘introduces the possibility of representing a fuller (and organically unified) body, and of confirming the status of speech as an individual property right.’ But at the same time, their repetitive and rhythmic automaton-like voices become compulsive gestures that fragment the narrative and cause a frightening repetition. Franklin Mendez writes that ‘in the constant repetition [in Mary’s Cherries], the entire production unravels in a rhythmic cacophony of labouring bodies, until the space itself become a fragmented body, filled with useless joints, unexplainable limbs, mysterious orifices, strange secretions, and impossible spaces.’ Here, the rhythmic corporeality of the video and its twinned installation, alongside the women’s demanding and recurring calls invokes the compulsion to repeat, and Freud’s death-drive is suggested. The Freudian death-drive is an instinct to return to an earlier state of things, to ‘return to the inertia inherent in organic life,’ and the sex drives and the death drive vacillate in a life-death rhythm.

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One group of instincts rushes forward so as to reach the final aim of life as swiftly as possible; but when a particular stage in the advance has been reached, the other group jerks back to a certain point to make a fresh start and so prolong the journey.\textsuperscript{378}

The movement of the repetitive images on screen, alongside the sounds of the women – their breathing, speaking, sighing, squeezing, cycling, eating – creates a rhythmic, yet disjointed, pattern whereby the audience seems to be pulled to the edge of life and back again.

The women Rottenberg cast for the video are ‘fantasy wrestlers,’ these women ‘hire their personal services’ and their job is to wrestle with men until they win. The fact that Rottenberg asked these women, women whose job it is to emasculate men, is an unusual twist to the set-up of the video. Yet, these women are employed to beat the man, ‘safety words’ and outfits accentuate the fact that these KO’d customers are fetishists who, through a reversal of power, wish to ‘investigat[e] the woman, demystify her mystery.’\textsuperscript{379} Thus the body itself is the issue in this video. The fantasy-wrestling women are ‘bought and paid for’, both by the men that want to be crushed by them, but also Rottenberg herself. She contacts them through their various websites and pays the ‘going rate’ for their time. The body itself is commodified through this action and simultaneously through the conversion of fingernails into cherries. The woman with bird-like talons can be seen as a mythological representation of monstrosity, including myths surrounding Lilith, Medusa and Lamia. As Ted Tollefson notes, when Lilith was banished from the Garden of Eden for her overt sexuality, she was ‘turned from an uppity woman into a demon with the talons of a bird of prey.’\textsuperscript{380} This simple bodily attribute has become embedded in classic Hollywood films as metaphor for a monstrous form of female sexuality, it can be seen in many Hitchcock’s films, particularly in The Birds, and Psycho, which I mentioned in Chapter One. The monstrous-feminine in Mary’s Cherries is thus commodified and converted into a product of decoration – a fetish, both bodily, by the representation of the red nails (the sexual harlot), and as a product, an addition to ‘sophisticated’ drinks. In fact, when interviewed, Rottenberg stated that she sees the embellished woman entirely as ‘decoration’; Mary’s artificially painted nails become synonymous with the

\textsuperscript{378} ibid., p. 41.
\textsuperscript{379} Linda Williams, ‘When the Woman Looks,’ op. cit., p. 22.
glacé cherry. The cherry’s status as merely ‘an adornment for a drink’ illustrates Rottenberg’s belief in the superficiality surrounding femininity.\textsuperscript{381} Interestingly, the word fetish etymologically stems from the Portuguese feitico which itself stemmed from factitium, which means ‘to paint, to adorn, to embellish.’\textsuperscript{382} Rottenberg’s vision of feminine ornamentation is present in the word fetish itself, and Laura Mulvey notes that the fetishized female figure and the fetishized commodity are both constructed – they are made from ‘raw material or the body, to acquire value.’\textsuperscript{383}

There is an obviously abject quality to the transformation of nails to cherries, the disgust and nausea at the thought of eating them alludes to the ‘most elementary and most archaic form of abjection’\textsuperscript{384} – food loathing. As I discussed in Interim One, Rosemary Betterton suggests that food, unlike the corpse or the female body, is the most appropriate form of visualising abjection in contemporary art. She believes that female artists cannot simply reclaim the abject female body to explore the monstrous-feminine through representations of corporeality, because representations of the body are fraught with issues in art history. I cannot agree with Betterton, as I feel the monstrous female body needs to be positioned in art practices, for if you ‘censor the body ... you censor breath and speech at the same time.’\textsuperscript{385} I can in some ways make sense of her position in art practices that deal with food because she believes they ‘offer a means of exploring the complex role of corporeality in the constitution of the (feminine) speaking body,’\textsuperscript{386} but to represent orality and language while denying the body is simply presenting food as a metaphor for femininity – which is no better than presenting the negative binaries of monstrosity or spatiality as feminine metaphor. Furthermore, Betterton’s belief that women probably ‘prefer chocolate to sex’ is extremely generalizing and denies femininity an active position in sexual identity, just as patriarchy and psychoanalysis does, which I will discuss further in relation to lesbian sexuality in Chapter Four. Through her use of female bodies Rottenberg doesn’t solely promote the metaphors that position femininity into binaries, rather, she examines the liminal nature of the female body through these metaphors. In a

\textsuperscript{381} Transcript from Tate Channel, ‘Meet the Artist: Mika Rottenberg,’ in TateShots, Video Interview, <http://channel.tate.org.uk/media/26515640001> (accessed 20/08/11).
\textsuperscript{382} Laura Mulvey, Fetishism and Curiosity, op. cit., p. 47.
\textsuperscript{383} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{384} Kristeva, Powers of Horror, op. cit., p. 2.
\textsuperscript{385} Cixous, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, op. cit., p. 880.
\textsuperscript{386} Betterton, An Intimate Distance, op. cit., p. 138.
sense, Rottenberg has created a piece that employs the fetishes of commodity and sexuality in a form of Debordian ‘détournement’ by these spectacularized images to ‘paradoxically embrace spectacularisation in order to launch a critique against it.’

The fetishized spectacle of Rose’s overweight body stands out from the other women in Mary’s Cherries, physically due to her size and also through Rottenberg’s sensual close-ups. Rose becomes the sexualized figure, unlike Barbara and Mary who are either just sporadically shown, or merely receive the occasional close-up. Rose’s bosom that falls out between the buttons of her uniform are lovingly panned over, her narcissistic stare into the mirror is penetrated by the camera, her perspiration from cycling is microscopically explored, and her pouting lips are zoomed into – when she rolls the fingernails into cherries, the camera focus is not on the action but rather the rhythmic jiggling of her barely-covered, braless breasts. These breasts represent the maternal, the first object of desire for the child, yet the breast exists as an object even before awareness of the mother – the mother becomes the first ‘love-object’ as an extension/replacement for the desire of the object-breast. It is not surprising then that the breast becomes the most eroticized fetish. The eroticization of Rose’s large figure recalls Maud Ellmann’s assertion that ‘fat … has come to represent the very hallmark of modernity.’ She writes:

The fat woman, particularly if she is nonwhite and working-class, has come to embody everything the prosperous must disavow: imperialism, exploitation, surplus value, maternity, mortality.

abjection, and unloveliness. Heavier with projections than with flesh, she siphons off this guilt, desire, and denial, leaving her idealized counterpart behind: the kind of woman she sees on billboards, sleek and streamlined like the cars that she is often used to advertise, bathed in the radiance of the commodity.388

Mary Russo agrees with Ellmann and expands by noting that the fat female body is the ‘ultimate of abjection’; she is the personification of the abjected nature of the ‘dangers of overproduction,’ and through societal disgust the fat female body simultaneously shows the disavowal of capitalist exploitation.389

Similarly, in an interesting essay entitled Fetishisms, Mulvey connects the two pervading concepts of fetish, those of Freud and Marx. In an analysis of both the Freudian fetish and Marxist commodity fetishism, Mulvey asserts the fact that, like film, both lie in the image of the spectacle, as the object ‘becomes image and belief, and is secured by an erotic, rather than a religious aura.’390

The fetish deals with disavowal, either denial of sexual difference, or denial of labour in production – both forms of disavowal are embedded in the ‘commodity’ of cinema which bridges the woman-as-spectacle with the commodity-as-spectacle on the screen. The cinematic screen itself becomes a spectacular ‘surface’ or mirror so that we can see that the ‘woman, consumer par excellence, [...] consumes commodities to construct her own sexual surface into an armour of fetishistic defence against the taboos of the feminine that patriarchy depends on.'391 In a dichotomous quality Rottenberg’s Rose, through her fetishized yet abject body by means of her overly sexualized, lipsticked, and commodified fatness – her monstrous ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’ – becomes the image of a tactile corporeal embodiment that represents both spectacular fetishistic disavowal and its simultaneous and fascinating abject demise. Through the constant repetition, ‘the arrested, repeated shots [in video] imply a desire for incompleteness, for a perpetual deferment and frustration against the totalising impulse characteristic of spectacle.’392 Through the constantly echoing image of Rose, the ‘fetish itself has failed’.393

Ultimately, the installation of the video points a finger to us, the audience. Tanya Leighton notes that in film: ‘Spectacle brings us an image of

390 Laura Mulvey, Fetishism and Curiosity, op. cit., p. 4.
393 Laura Mulvey, Fetishism and Curiosity, op. cit., p. 13-14.
our era that has totalized itself, emptied itself of beliefs, traditions, contents, latency and sacredness, and replaced them with commodities.' The monstrous spectacle of the excessive female body, both literally and spatially creates a repetition, an imbrication of fetishisms that implode upon themselves. At every turn, the fetish temp – the female body, the production of food – but through their overlapping that invokes the maternal; each repels through abject disgust. Throughout the installation, the reappearance of the production-line escaping outwards and protruding into our ‘space,’ denotes the fact that Mary’s Cherries is merely a mirror that holds itself up to us, to our fetishism, to our commodification of these women. As Ursula Frohne notes, the destabilization of the viewer in a video installation changes the visitor’s perspective from a ‘situation that focused on viewer’s optical reception of the work to one that focuses on the viewer’s responsibility.’ While humorous, the video installation, with its horror-based gnarled ‘talons’ literally pointing at us, is a powerful metaphor for the many forms of the fetishization of femininity, and makes it apparent that liminally working within the female body’s ultimately fluid and abject self is the only way to make it collapse.

**Sue de Beer**

Moving on to the final and most complex installation discussed in this chapter, Sue de Beer’s installation Black Sun consists of a double channel video piece, which is played side-by-side within a large wooden construction shaped like a skeletal pseudo-Gothic house - an (intentionally) poorly made parody of a film set which alludes to anthropomorphic dwellings from horror films such as *The Haunting* (Robert Wise, 1963), *House of Usher* (Roger Corman, 1960), and *Psycho*. Yet while the house is most certainly in the Gothic-style, with its elongated pointed-arch windows, the house itself is painted in a garish pink emulsion and covered in flowers and images of kittens – the construction itself vacillates very strangely between a haunted house and a doll’s house. When asked about her fascination with girly toys – the stuffed beanbag animals used in her installations and imagery of cute creatures – de Beer says: ‘You can love

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a toy safely because you know it won’t fuck with you, but when the toys start
fucking with you too – you know things have gotten bad,” which references
horror films such as *Dolly Dearest* (Dir. Maria Lease, 1992), and *Childs Play* (Dir.
Tom Holland, 1988). Addressing similar themes to Chloe Piene, Sue de Beer’s
work focuses entirely on the tropes of horror, and like Piene, issues of
adolescence also arise within de Beer’s work; in all her work bright colours and
repeated imagery of dolls, kittens and teddy bears accentuates the liminal
state of puberty.

![Image](image.png)

**Fig. 25.** Sue de Beer, *Black Sun*, 2005.
Double channel video installation, two external installation shots.

Yet, what stands out in de Beer’s practice is a very prominent awareness
of psychoanalytical theories of sexuality, and the installation, *Black Sun*, is a
us to find a substitute love object to compensate for a loss or wound’

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397 Just a little anecdote… When I was seven, I saw a trailer for *Dolly Dearest*. It was only the trailer!!! But practically every night after, I had nightmares about my dolls coming to life until at least my teens. So I’m not surprised that Sue de Beer references films like these, they are extremely powerful…
loss of the maternal object, which again goes back to the same time that the first abjection (of the mother) takes place.

In Black Sun Kristeva discusses the idea of the female child in relation to abjection. Up until now, I have not discussed the psychoanalytical analysis of the feminine, because it is one that is fraught with issues, as most feminist theorists have refuted Freud’s analyses. Kristeva follows Freud and Lacan in their patriarchal position of the feminine, much to the dismay of feminist theorists, as I will discuss in later chapters. Returning to Black Sun, Kristeva notes that as we have to abject the maternal to form subjectivity by a mental ‘matricide’, what happens to the female subject if the female body is abjected? ‘Upon losing mother and relying on negation, I retrieve her as sign, image, word.’\(^{399}\) The female needs to negate the loss of the mother, but she who ‘disavows the negation,’ who does not concede to language as a replacement of the murder of the maternal, will thus become inarticulately melancholic – because her body, while abjected from society, cannot be negated.

For a woman, whose specular identification with the mother as well as the introjection of the maternal body and self are more immediate, such an inversion of matricidal drive into a death-bearing maternal image is more difficult, if not impossible. Indeed, how can She be that bloodthirsty Fury, since I am She (sexually and narcissistically), She is I?\(^{400}\)

In her critique of Marguerite Duras and other women writers, Kristeva believes that melancholia turns female writing into a repetitive and monotonous inarticulateness:

Faced with the impossibility of concatenating, they utter sentences that are interrupted, exhausted, come to a standstill. Even phrases they cannot formulate. A repetitive rhythm, a monotonous melody emerge and dominate the broken logical sequences, changing them into recurring, obsessive litanies.\(^{401}\)

Unlike male writers who can utilize their frustration of maternal loss to create ‘masterful’ prose, Kristeva sees the feminine as losing the battle with the maternal negation and cannot escape the loss of her body – and narrative cannot be grasped. She writes:

The narrative web is a thin film constantly threatened with bursting.

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\(^{399}\) ibid., 63.

\(^{400}\) ibid., p. 28-29.

\(^{401}\) ibid., p. 33.
For, when the boundary between subject and object is shaken, and when even the limit between inside and outside becomes uncertain, the narrative is what is challenged first. If it continues nevertheless, its makeup changes; its linearity is shattered, it proceeds by flashes, enigmas, short cuts, incompletion, tangles, and cuts. The narrative yields to a crying-out theme that, when it tends to coincide with the incandescent states of a boundary-subjectivity that I have called abjection, is the crying-out theme of suffering-horror. In other words, the theme of suffering-horror is the ultimate evidence of such states of abjection within a narrative representation. If one wished to proceed farther still along the approaches to abjection, one would find neither narrative nor theme but a recasting of syntax and vocabulary—the violence of poetry, and silence.  

Almost in a visualization of this quote, Sue de Beer’s Black Sun is an exploration of this feminine position in narrative; visually, temporally and spatially constructing the vehement non-narrative of the melancholic woman. According to Kristeva, to have any sense of subjectivity, liminal or otherwise, means that femininity has to navigate this thorny and non-narrative melancholic temperament – on the edge of despair, ‘the promises of the void, of death…’, the female subject must vacillate on the edge of the death drive, and be in constant fear of erasure. But to create art, which as Kristeva notes ‘allows the ego to assume an existence on the basis of its very vulnerability to the other,’ thus creates a space where the possibility of going beyond the pre-Symbolic matricide is attempted. Yet, the female artist, or writer, cannot fight to be in the symbolic as her body is excluded from it, ‘she exists in language only in relation to the male sign, as what man is not, as the negative end of the binary opposition: of masculinity/femininity.’ Within her melancholia, she cannot make any coherent narrative but can only repeat; through her repetitive navigation between negation and denial, the horror of abjection appears. Horror becomes the feminine’s only certainty, and the artwork of the melancholic becomes a traumatic and hypnotic journey towards the ‘place where meaning collapses.’ Whether this position of melancholy is one of ‘appropriate’ appropriation is a difficult question to answer. This concept will be discussed more in Interim Four through an analysis of Bracha L. Ettinger’s psychoanalytical research, but as it is connected to de Beer’s work it will be explored in relation to the video – even though I feel de

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404 Ibid., p. 17.
Beer’s work goes beyond merely the melancholic trauma that Kristeva positions in the female writer/artist’s work.

In *Black Sun*, the confusing and repetitive temporality on screen accentuates the melancholic repetition in an imbricated feminine muddle. In a similar vein to the other artists, there is a looping and self-reflexive narrative. Previous images are (re)displayed in different contexts, sometimes showing one of the three young female protagonists, then the same sequence with a different girl, and at other times displaying two of the girls simultaneously on different screens. Like Piene’s *Blackmouth*, the video invokes childhood adolescence, and awakening sexuality. Divided into three ages, around eleven, seventeen and twenty-eight, *Black Sun* opens with the youngest girl dressed in nightclothes gradually walking up a set of stairs towards an older woman (her mother, or herself?) who is asleep. As she reaches the top of the stairs, the young girl slowly opens a door – but the screen fades to black halting the narrative. This image of the girl walking up the very liminal stairs is repeated throughout the video by all protagonists, again recalling the Freudian compulsion to repeat. Chrissie Iles believes moments of blackness in video art ‘represent the place where one looks away, or the signs of what cannot be shown or even thought.’ In this first section, the image of the girl thus represents the child entering a forbidden world, a world of adulthood, of female sexuality, of secrets and masks.

*Fig. 26.* Sue de Beer, *Black Sun*, 2005. Double channel video installation, 23:18 mins (looped), combined video stills.

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In the video, the constant repetition of movement towards the bedroom, the space of the *primal scene*, evokes both the neurosis of the Kristevian melancholic and its relation to language. (In the video, do we glance from one screen to the other and possibly see an undressed man in the room with the ‘mother’? Or is it our imagination?) The mental construction of the primal scene that precedes the Oedipus complex finally positions the child in the symbolic – the Law of the Father allows no further return to the maternal envelope. Language becomes our replacement for the mother, and, as mentioned above, the melancholic’s matricidal denial excludes her from language. Similarly, if ‘witnessing’ the primal scene affects the child’s psychosexual development, causing neurosis, then it must also affect the child’s entry into language, as Ned Lukacher notes. Lukacher believes that the primal scene, which may or may not have been witnessed, affects a relationship between ‘historical memory and imaginative construction.’ In language, this manifests itself when a reader ‘has good reason the believe that the meaning of one text is historically dependent on the meaning of another … even though there is no conclusive evidential or archival means of establishing the case beyond reasonable doubt.’

This concept explores the liminal and inaccessible quality of language to comprehend the Real. Lukacher writes:

The primal scene is a strategic answer to the dilemma of a critical discourse that on the one hand maintains the impossibility of a moving beyond interpretation to a discourse of truth but on the other hand has not forgotten that the burden of the truth continues to make itself felt. The primal scene is an effort to answer the unanswerable call of the Real, a call that emerges from the undisclosed essence of language itself.

Sue de Beer’s insertion of allusions to the primal scene accordingly deals with this issue of the Real and the pre-Symbolic alongside the repressed horror of the primal scene, and through Lukacher’s interpretation it simultaneously creates a visual uncertainty as to whether the events in the video are taking place in

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409 The Real was coined by Lacan, and is ‘what eludes psychoanalysis, but what psychoanalysis seeks to interpret.’ Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis*, Croom Helm, Kent, 1986, p. 192. The Real is a time that cannot be put into language because it was constructed before our entry into language, and consists of only need and a sense of fulfilment provided by the maternal. Although not cited by her, Kristeva subsequently developed her concept of the chora through Lacan’s lectures on the Real. Please see chapter one for an analysis of the chora.
actuality, are imagined, or an unstable fluctuation between the two.

And so, returning to the video, the oscillating narrative repeats the insecurity of the protagonist’s sexual development, where memory, hidden desires, and daydreams are manifested on-screen. The masking of female sexuality becomes literal in the second ‘act’ of the video, where the girl at seventeen is in a graveyard, dancing, drinking, flirting and laughing with a boy. Here we are powerfully aware of the ‘frightful’ sexual awakening that previously haunted, and halted, the first section. In the graveyard, the girl is shroud in a sheet and skeleton mask, although a typical hallowe’en costume, it is a metaphor for a ghostly liminality. ‘The ghost [is] in effect a stain,’ a residual memory of the past that cannot escape, as is the space of graveyard itself, as social historian Owen Davies notes, ‘as night [falls], it [becomes] a liminal space as the boundaries between the two worlds [of the living and the dead] dissolve.’

As the girl is left alone among the painted and fabricated gravestones, she provocatively dances, and removes her spectral costume, performing a striptease down to her overtly sexual black lace underwear - invoking the ‘monstrous’ internal sexuality that she now begins to feel, her liminality between childhood and adulthood frighteningly clear – the video uses uncanny and abject ‘distortions of time and place to evoke the anxious process of adolescent psychosexual awakening.

In the third act the girl, now twenty-eight, alone on a badly constructed set of an airplane, applies make-up (which again, evokes another supposed mask of femininity’s ‘lack’) and sits pensively on an aircraft, which, like the stairs in Piene’s installation, is a powerful metaphor for the liminal. Furthermore, as Auriel Kolnai notes, the ‘object of disgust is prone to be connected with something which is concealed, secretive, multilayered, uncanny, sinister, as well as with something which is shameless, obtrusive, and alluring.’ Through her application of make-up she demonstrates that she is aware of her hidden fetishized monstrosity, because ‘everything that is disgusting has in it something which is at one and the same time both striking and veiled, as is, say, a poisonous red berry or a garishly made-up face.’ The concept of the mask is

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reiterated in the construction of the vibrant, yet Gothic house set and subsequent installation, both masked by images of cute and ‘girly’ kittens and flowers. The flowers and animals represent a development from childhood to adolescence, a time to experiment with makeup and fakery. Via Kristeva’s *Black Sun* it evokes ideas surrounding masking ‘feminine artifice.’ Kristeva writes:

> Artifice, as sublime meaning for and on behalf of the underlying, implicit nonbeing, replaces the ephemeral. Beauty is consubstantial with it. Like feminine finery concealing stubborn depressions, beauty emerges as the admirable face of loss, transforming it in order to make it live.416

This quote suggests that de Beer’s (re)creation of these film sets represent the ‘hidden’ element of the feminine, the ‘lack’ which the fetish endeavours to conceal. The concept of makeup, as discussed by Irigaray, is a form of fetishistic disavowal – a container that represents the lack in woman. Not situated in subjectivity, and positioned as a thing – an envelope – by patriarchy, as I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, woman uses makeup to ‘create her own envelope’ of protection. As she is positioned as other, and ‘she cannot make use of the envelope that she is,’417 because it is being used by men, she must create an artificial envelope in make up. Like Rottenberg’s Rose character, the female must always be aware of her artifice, ‘covering her lack with beauty’ to quote Mulvey. While the house is luridly pink, with kittens painted onto its exterior walls, just like the ‘painted lady,’ it cannot escape its haunted and haunting effect, because the fetish will fail.

Returning to the girl in the video, while applying her fetishized mask of femininity on the aeroplane, it seems as though her thoughts revisit her childhood, as she is now again walking up the stairs of the haunted house (another form of doubling and repetition), opening the door and finally entering the room that she was prevented from doing before. She has become what was within the room. Her mother. Sue de Beer’s use of four very similar looking actresses throughout the video (to represent the girl at three ages and the ‘mother’), evokes a sense of repetition, and connotes that this final girl in the room is corporeally both her mother and herself, an intentional allusion to the pre-Symbolic state of abjection – ‘[a]t the doors of the feminine, at the doors of abjection.’418 And rather than merely alluding to the fetishized ‘lack’ of

the castrated female, this impenetrable door that the girl finally enters, recalls the concept of the *Vagina Dentata*; the myth of the ‘castrating female’. As Creed notes:

A ... visual motif associated with the *Vagina Dentata* is that of the barred or dangerous entrance. The *Vagina Dentata* is [interpreted as] an expression of the dyadic mother; the all-encompassing maternal figure of the pre-Oedipal period who threatens symbolically to engulf the infant, thus posing a threat of psychic obliteration.\(^{419}\)

This quote is reminiscent of the function of the need to reject the abject mother. But these castrating female genitals also link abjection with the fetish, and Sue de Beer’s motif of the mask is concealing more than femininity’s lack. As I discussed regarding The Lick Drawings in Interim Two, Creed discusses the threat of castration, which can take two possible forms. The first is what produces the fetish, the horror that the female is ‘castrated’ and the subsequent disavowal of this through a fetish object. The second form is the *Vagina Dentata*; the ‘castrating vagina’ that Freud rejects, but which Creed believes is another possible explanation for the use of the fetish object. The fear of castration via the vagina thus returns again to the female body as site of the horrific - not as ‘lack’, but as the monstrous potential to create a lack in the male. This vacillation between castrating and castrated femininity produces horror through a breakdown of binaries.

Collapsing binaries can be seen throughout the installation. The implied portal into the darkness of the video that Piene presents to us in *Blackmouth* is actualized in de Beer’s *Black Sun* – we are literally within the house of the video – the haunted house of horror, and our sense of space is defined by this encroaching building. The domestic space as patriarchally restrictive is emphasised in the installation but through the video the work attempts to challenge this ‘from within.’ This concept of ‘within’ the phallocentric house recalls Mika Rottenberg’s (ab)use of the spectacle. The house of Gothic novels and the horror film has always been feminized and frightening, the (literal and metaphorical) ghosts of restricted femininity can be seen in Hill House in *The Haunting* and Manderley in *Rebecca*, as well as Thornfield Hall in *Jane Eyre*.

In fact, Bertha Mason’s metaphorical haunting of Thornfield Hall in *Jane Eyre* defines the position of the monstrous feminine in Victorian society; she is

sexually provocative, mad, ghostly, animalistic, and violent. Her confinement in the attic exemplifies the patriarchal restrictions of the feminine. Bertha Mason’s position in Jane Eyre is seen by some as a mirror image of the eponymous protagonist, she is Jane’s doppelgänger as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar note in The Madwoman in the Attic:

Jane first clearly perceives her terrible double when Bertha puts on the wedding veil intended for the second Mrs. Rochester, and turns to the mirror. At that moment, Jane sees “the reflection of the visage and features quite distinctly in the dark oblong glass,” sees them as if they were her own.\(^{420}\)

Bertha is the epitome of abjection, because she defies the perceived feminine position, and through the many identifications in the novel, literary studies have positioned Jane as abject, and possibly even more so than Bertha whose insanity provides her with a sense of excuse for her actions. Jane’s refusal to be locked up by society transgresses the perceived role of femininity – but in fact, many literary theorists have considered Jane to have a masculine role – ordered, moralistic and law-abiding, as if Charlotte Brontë had just replaced the masculine pronoun with the feminine. Bertha’s position is much more fascinating, because her identity, sexual or otherwise, is entirely ambiguous.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak analyses Bertha’s dual heritage in relation to colonial discourse, and she believes that Brontë is, however unwittingly, implicated in the imperialist exclusion of Bertha. As Richard Dyer notes, ‘white women do not have the same relation to power as white men. ... One result of this ... is that white women simultaneously stand for white power and yet are shown to be unable either to exercise it effectively or change what they perceive to be its abuses.’\(^{421}\) Yet, Spivak sees Bronte’s characterisation of Bertha in the book as defined as a ‘not-yet-human Other,’\(^{422}\) she positions Bertha in opposition to Jane but not merely as Jane’s ‘dark double,’ but as something more powerful. By aligning Jane with Bertha, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar do in The Madwoman in the Attic, Spivak believes that the creation of ‘other’ via the non-Western woman in Jane Eyre was a narrative technique to highlight the Western woman’s developing autonomous


subjectivity, at the expense of Bertha’s subjectivity – Jane relies on Bertha’s ‘blackness’ for her own ‘whiteness.’ She quotes Jane’s description of Bertha in *Jane Eyre*:

In the deep shade, at the further end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not ... tell: it groveled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face.423

Positioning Bertha as an animal defines her in a binary of human/non-human, which really can be defined as white power/black lack. Yet, Spivak feels that the positioning of this within binaries is reductive.424 Defining non-Western women by what they are not diminishes any sense of subjectivity in the same way as defining woman as not-man does – it reduces Bertha to merely ‘other.’ It is, as I mentioned in Chapter Two, creating a sense of polarity to ‘tame difference.’ This racial othering can be seen in Frantz Fanon’s experiential writing from *The Fact of Blackness/The Lived Experience of the Black*: ‘The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly... the nigger’s going to eat me up.’425 By transforming her into animal, Bertha is abjected by Jane; she is positioned as ‘what she is not,’ so that Jane can develop her own subjectivity. As Tina Chanter notes:

Abjection happens when individuals, peoples, nations, states or political, religious, or ethnic groups attempt to set themselves up as pure and good by requiring other to occupy a place of impurity, a place of evil. ... As often as not, it happens out of feelings of insecurity or anxiety, defensiveness or inadequacy, weakness and fear of contamination. In order to rid myself of my guilt, my feelings of unworthiness, I deny my fear or cowardice, and project it onto others, who then come to resent it for me. I cannot be dirty and disgusting, so another must be it for me. I must purify myself.426

Jane must purify herself and situate Bertha as other, as bell hooks notes:

‘Stereotypes, however inaccurate, are one form of representation. Like fictions,

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423 Quoted in ibid., p. 247.
they are created to serve as substitutions, standing in for what is real. ...They are fantasy, a projection onto the Other that makes them less threatening."\textsuperscript{427} Echoing Spivak, bell hooks discusses the reversal of the concept of terror about race; through colonialism, she sees whiteness as being terrifying to the black imagination. Yet, hook’s position is to attempt to ‘repudiate the us-and-them dichotomies’, and explore the ‘possibilities that surface when positionality is problematized.’\textsuperscript{428} Similarly, Jane positions Bertha as black, as sex-crazed, as animalistic and as opposite to Jane as she could be, yet what the book reveals is that this is not the case. Bertha’s dual heritage and subsequent marriage to Rochester implies that Bertha is perceived as white. As Susan Meyer notes, Bertha is ‘passing’ as white; her race is constructed by Jane’s narrative and she subsequently ‘becomes’ black.\textsuperscript{429} Thus it is not her blackness that terrifies; it is Bertha’s liminality, her hybridity, that causes such horror for Jane.

In an interesting connection, Maureen Molloy notes that the Freudian uncanny links to the repression of the feminine, and simultaneously as the ‘haunting uncanny of cultural domination.’\textsuperscript{430} In her essay ‘Death and the Maiden’ (1999), she analyses how imperialism has developed into the concept of the postcolonial globalized nation, and can be metaphorized into the uncanny female body. Through an analysis of Julia Kristeva’s \textit{Strangers To Ourselves}, and Homi Bhabha’s \textit{The Location of Culture}, she suggests that ‘strange’ doublings or the ghost of the feminine can be seen in both theorists’ work (as well as Freud, as I mentioned in Chapter One). Molloy believes that in his analysis of the ‘cultural uncanny,’ Bhabha condenses ‘female’ with ‘home,’ and simultaneously in his analysis of \textit{The Sand-Man} he presents the automaton as cultural difference, but forgets that Olimpia is feminine. Bhabha writes that in Hoffman’s story, the memory of the automaton frightens the population so much that ‘an absurd mistrust of human figures began to prevail.’\textsuperscript{431} In order to prove that the women are real, they had occasionally to sing out of time, or show that she had ‘some thinking or feeling,’ Bhabha sees this as ‘culture’s double bind’ in which people must prove their humanity, ‘how to be just untrue enough to culture’s generalities to be truly human, without being so untrue that

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{427} bell hooks, \textit{Belonging: A Culture of Place}, Routledge, New York, 2009, p. 96.
\item\textsuperscript{428} Ibid., p. 105.
\item\textsuperscript{431} ETA Hoffman, ‘The Sand-Man’ as cited in ibid., p. 159.
\end{itemize}
one passes beyond humanity – that is the colonial question.\textsuperscript{432} But Molloy believes that Bhabha, either intentionally or unintentionally, misses that these acting women are in fact feminine – the feminine is ‘both human and not fully human, both necessary and repressed, both bounded and unbounded,’\textsuperscript{433} and thus strange and threatening. Molloy subsequently notes:

The uncanny, with its implications of doubling, merging, and return of the repressed, is the expression and the affect of the feminine. The lack of boundaries, surety, and the return of the archaic make it also a powerful expression of the postcolonial nation.\textsuperscript{434}

Applying this to Jane Eyre, the frightening potential of Bertha represents not merely her supposed otherness, but also the frightening uncanny collapse of otherness in her female body itself – she defines the potential breakdown of Jane’s cultural subjectivity and her refusal to allow this liminality is what makes Bertha so fearsome. Bertha’s liminal status by being neither Creole nor English, or rather both, positions her in a fascinating in-betweeness; her liminality – her explicit sexuality, her mixed heritage, her continual escape from the attic prison and ghostly movement under the cover of night, her animalistic movement – is what makes her more frightening and more patriarchally challenging than Jane’s character could ever be. But it is only when she tries to escape from her liminality does she fail. Bertha’s ultimate act, the burning of Thornfield Hall, leads to her death. When she tries to denounce her position within the household, within society, locked into the domestic and colonial spheres and being subjugated by their power, she realizes she cannot escape, physically moving from inside to outside, and death is her only option. Bertha’s previously liminal position within these binary oppositions had kept her alive. Perhaps the house is in fact the most important place to explore the complicity of phallocentric, or indeed colonial, hold – working from within rather than from without.

After a long tangent, I wish to return to de Beer’s installation with a greater awareness of the implications of the constructed house, and liminality, in both the video and the installation. Traditionally, a cinematic experience creates a powerful sense of engagement with the screen through the darkened room of the cinema – the surrounding blackness positions the screen at the centre of the audience’s view and therefore pulls the viewer away from the architectural

\textsuperscript{432} ibid., p. 160.
\textsuperscript{433} ibid.
\textsuperscript{434} ibid.
nuances of the environment. Unlike de Beer’s installation, the audience cannot engage with the spatial elements of the room, but merely experiences the two-dimensional representation of pseudo-space on the screen. Similarly, the cinematic presentation creates a disjunction in the physical reality of space and time, as the two-dimensional space of the image is pictorially but not physically there – it is ‘neither absolutely two-dimensional nor absolutely three-dimensional, but something between’\footnote{Rudolph Arnheim, \textit{Film as Art}, Faber, London, 1969, p. 20.} – and the temporal narrative on screen, unlike theatre, is dislocated from the audience in terms of being filmed in the past. The temporal narrative is the only factor in film, and subsequently the production of filmic pseudo-space is only present to construct an illusion of coherent ‘reality’ and narrative in which to be immersed. Yet, in de Beer’s installation, ‘the end of the illusion begins with the participation of the spectator,’\footnote{Ursula Frohne, ‘Dissolution of the Frame: Immersion and Participation in Video Installations,’ in Tanya Leighton (ed.), \textit{Art and the Moving Image: A Critical Reader}, Tate Publishing, London, 2008, p. 370.} as the awareness of the surrounding installation breaks the passive spectatorial position. This dominant structure of passive spectatorship is entirely fetishistic – as Griselda Pollock notes: ‘In the fetishistic regime the viewer is at once separated from what s/he is seeing but enthralled into identification with an imaginary world in which threatening knowledge is allayed by beautiful images.’\footnote{Pollock, \textit{Vision and Difference}, op. cit., 1988, p. 163.} The suture process is heightened by the insertion of the ‘beautiful image’ of the female body. Silverman observes in her essay \textit{Suture} that the use of the shot-reverse-shot sequence sets up a ‘relay of glances between the male characters within the fiction and the male viewers in the theatre audience, a relay which has the female body as its object.’\footnote{Kaja Silverman, ‘Suture’, in Philip Rosen (ed.), \textit{Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology}, Colombia University Press, New York, 1986, pp. 219-235, p. 228-229.} Yet the double screen in de Beer’s installation fractures any development of the possessive shot-reverse-shot because any hint of a male protagonist (if seen at all) is fleeting. There is no way of objectifying the feminine – spatiality is feminine and ‘the haunted house is the human body itself.’\footnote{Badley, \textit{Film, Horror and the Body Fantastic}, op. cit., p. 6.} The haunted house is an ‘open vessel and makes it structurally similar to the female’s anatomy, triggering the uncanny response which the male purportedly first experiences in relation to the mother’s body.’\footnote{Katherine Fowkes, \textit{Giving Up the Ghost: Spirits, Ghosts and Angels in Mainstream Comedy Films}, Wayne State University Press, Michigan, 1998, p. 70.} As Katherine Fowkes notes, ‘because horror films dramatize and map sexual difference, the house comes to represent the many
abject qualities associated with the maternal’. Yet, in *Black Sun* the house surrounds the audience, maternally envelops, and metaphorically cushions the spectator into the *chora* of the pre-Symbolic. The installation becomes the womb, however monstrous and uncanny it may be to some.

![Image](image.png)

**Fig. 27.** Sue de Beer, *Black Sun*, 2005.
Double channel video installation, internal installation shot.

Exploring the possible negatives of installation in general, Tanya Leighton notes that most video installation practices attempt to destroy the techniques of suture. Yet, she believes that work like Bill Viola’s, where the entire installation becomes an immersive and captivating cinematic space – a ‘bewitching mysticism,’ can cause an even more aggressive form of passive immersion than classic cinema. She writes that ‘these immersive projected environments might confound bodily perception and technological mediation to the point where the viewer is neither discouraged from trying to extract himself from the matrix of the filmic event nor from aligning themselves with the point of view of the camera.’

441 Ibid., p. 70-71.
videos use the space of the installation as extensions of the narrative; artists such as Piene, Rottenberg and de Beer use the installation as a distancing technique to avoid immersive narrative. Ursula Frohne notes that, unlike Viola’s extension of filmic narrative, some contemporary video installations:

...do not simply employ the effects of audience identification that make commercial entertainment films successful; they also employ distancing approaches that consciously instil disillusionment within the observer, and the same time as creating a palpable detachment from the visual effects of cinematographic fictions.443

In Black Sun, the distancing techniques are bound to a sense the uncanny, which ruptures any form of immersive position. Much of the actual on-screen action taking place in the (intentionally) badly-fabricated setting of the house; there is an uncomfortable sense of duplication and dislocation - one is aware of being within the gallery, whilst at the same time being on the film set which is a building, while watching that same building on screen – this multiple doubling, or compulsion to repeat, evokes a sense of the Freudian uncanny, and is very similar to Rottenberg’s installation – but in a more elaborate, effective and disturbing way. Black Sun’s two-channel video projection further represents the concept of the uncanny double, in which the images on-screen constantly and sporadically oscillate between different views. One view is a mirroring effect between the screens, where the image on one screen is the exact mirror image of the other. The second view on the screens shows a single image divided into two by the split in the projections. The third view is of a perceived double image, which appears to be the same on each screen, but while watching, one realizes that there is a slightly different perspective on each screen of the action taking place. The camera angles between the screens also slip between point-of-view shots, tracking shots, long shots, hand-held movements, and zooms. The double screen with these jerky multiple perspectives present the shifting state of identity; there is no fixed sense of self for the protagonist, or indeed, the audience – and immersion is negated. Through the doubling of image, installation and narrative, the piece activates ‘a spectatoral doubleness: ... explor[ing] the complex nature of mediated vision by asking the viewers to be present in the real gallery space and the virtual screen space simultaneously.’444

443 Frohne, ‘Dissolution of the Frame, op. cit., p. 359.
444 Mondloch, Screens, op. cit., p. xx.
Like film’s processes of production, the fetish is ‘always haunted by the fragility of the mechanisms that sustain it.’ Like film’s processes of production, the fetish is ‘always haunted by the fragility of the mechanisms that sustain it.’ Through the constant disorientation that the audience feels within the installation of Black Sun, the piece attempts to destabilize the concept of the cinematic experience by the multiple filmic views, and as the image of the girl is fractured and fragmented both physically and psychologically, the video does not lend itself to any form of the creation of fetish. Similarly, the concept of ‘ejecting the abject’ maternal body, which is achieved in the horror film, is not possible in the video installation, because the mother is metaphorically omnipresent throughout the piece — Kristeva’s construction of the inherent desire for the mother is constantly invoked in the image of the house and in the very title, Black Sun. Like Rottenberg’s Mary’s Cherries and Piene’s Blackmouth, de Beer presents this shifting identity of femininity in a fluctuating parallel to the ‘order’ of patriarchy, and shows the power of femininity ultimately lies in liminality.

The Attic’s Occupant(s)

Some contemporary theorists, including Maeve Connolly and Jeffrey Skoller, propose that the viewer’s physical movement through a video installation undermines an active engagement with the image — they believe that there is, and should be, a return by artists to the cinematic format of the darkened room, with fixed ‘screening’ times. According to Skoller, mobility ‘preclude[s] the creation of a subversive space outside the overflow of modern experience in which images can open into the flow of time as an engaged reflective experience.’ While there is some subversive quality in certain narrative videos (as I mentioned in Chapter Two), Skoller’s analysis focuses solely on the temporal quality of the image, and ignores the physical importance of the bodily experience. In contrast, artist Paul Sharits believes that passive spectatorship can be overridden if the ‘form of presentation does not prescribe a definite duration of respondent’s observation (i.e. the respondent may enter and leave at any time).’ To have, as Connolly and Skoller suggest, a video that has fixed screening times reduces movement entirely. To deny movement

445 Mulvey, Fetishism and Curiosity, op. cit., p. 8
447 As quoted in Mondloch, Screens, op. cit., p. 42.
revisits a mind/body duality, again returning to the binary. Through their practices, the artists discussed in this chapter do create an ‘engaged experience’ in the temporal quality of their installations, but the power in their work lies in going beyond the two-dimensional linearity of fixed spectatoral positions and provides a bodily interaction that is more physically tangible and avoids mere representation. The relation to the body through both the screen and the installation halts spectacle, and simultaneously creates an individual, emotional connection to space. As Giuliana Bruno notes:

...as one moves through space, a constant double movement connects interior and exterior topographies. The exterior landscape is transformed into an interior map – the landscape within us – as, conversely, we project outwards, onto the space we traverse, the motion of our own emotions. Space is, totally, a matter of feeling. It is practice that engages psychic change in relation to movement.

Cinema relies on appearances, and it is simply a ‘spectacular’ simulation; the connection between mind and body via movement of individual bodies in space and time produced by Piene, de Beer and Rottenberg is not possible in the fixed cinematic experience.

On another level, the physical relationship to video installation provides a corporeal movement long after the work is experienced, as Mondloch notes:

...the precise duration of one’s experience in the here and now of the gallery space is subservient to the eventual remembering of the work in another time and place – as if, well after all of the visitors have left and the doors are securely locked, the gallery remains strangely animated by illuminated images.

This non-linearity of video installation’s spatial construction provides a fascinating subversion of filmic temporality. As Piene’s monstrous protagonist embodies the dark, could she be anywhere that is enveloped in darkness? The continual factory line in Rottenberg’s Mary’s Cherries never stops, the artificial lighting never lets us see evening approaching, through the constant looping we never know whether they ‘punch in their time cards’, and go home to their loving families; they just keep on making those loathsome cherries. And the strange haunting of installation can be seen most powerfully in de Beer’s house, its physical construction denotes that even when the projector is switched off at

448 Bruno, Public Intimacy, op. cit., p. 66.
449 Mondloch, Screens, op. cit., p. 45.
the end of the day, the uncanny haunted effect of the building is still physically present within the gallery itself.

As I mentioned in Interim One, the construction of photography and video has its traditions in the analysis of hysteria, and creates ‘a space in which every gesture or expression is to be read as a symptom.’ As Lowry notes about video itself, ‘the interior space within which the scene takes place is confirmed as a space bounded by the performance of the symptom, its diagnosis, and its management; as a space which we might think of as a clinic, with the spectators taking on the detached and diagnostic gaze.’ Yet, in the work of these three artists, their installations do not provide the typical construction of analysand/analyst that would conventionally be offered up by the traditional single channel performance-to-camera practices – their work envelops the audience in their ‘psychosis’, and creates a dialogue or symbiotic relationship between artist, visitor and protagonist(s). Through this liminal interiority, the previous distanced position of the spectator in film cannot be established, and the video installations take the active and engaged visitor on a very different experience. As Tamara Trodd notes, the use of architectural nuances in video installation reveals the imbrication of the cinematic with the site of the female body, cinema is the ‘squirming space of the cinematically constituted imaginary, corporealised or realised physically as the fantasmatic interior of a specifically female body,’ but the architectural video installation (as she notes, interestingly, it can sometimes be seen via the representation of the haunted house in artworks), becomes the apparatus to ‘excavate’ the inscriptions of the female body. Avoiding the ‘glossy, hyper-real or spectacular, hysterical, enthralment with/or opposition to cinema which fixates male [artists] of their generation,’ the female artworks ‘hymn a certain slipping out of tune, a distortion of the space of projection in which the viewer’s subjectivity slips into an expanded spatial metaphors of displacement.’

While the horror film is an attempt to bring about a confrontation with the abject in order to ‘eject the abject and redraw boundaries’ between self and other, inside and outside, what I have attempted to show is that the break down of the narrative in these three works is the key to the subversion of the

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451 Ibid., p. 102.
452 Trodd, ‘Inside the Film Machine,’ op. cit., p. 166.
horror film. By not allowing the cinematic tropes to restore order, this subversion dissolves borders or limits, and represents heterogeneity and liminality. More importantly, what is explored in the horror film is the patriarchal disavowal of lack that frightens and attempts to dislodge the subjectivity of the male viewer. What about the female viewer? In her essay, *The Myth of Pandora*, Laura Mulvey, while discussing a feminine curiosity of the female body via the myth of Pandora’s box, believes that Pandora’s desire to look in the box, instead of being the ‘displaced representation of the female sexuality as mystery and threat’, actually represents the ‘self-reflexive desire to investigate the enigma of femininity itself’. Mulvey writes that ‘it is essential for feminists [and I would include here, women artists] to analyze through metaphors of understanding as ‘deciphering’ rather than metaphors of understanding as ‘seeing’.’ Via this action of deciphering, the ‘curious’ look of Pandora ‘represents a willingness, on the part of women, to investigate those aspects of the feminine that are, symptomatically, repressed under the regime of fetishism.’

As such, I believe that women artists employ these challenging modes of monstrosity, abjection and horror via a revolutionary (de)construction of narrative toposes, to fragment the phallocentric binaries, revoke the fetish, to work against the ‘ejection of the abject’, and to engender new compelling ways of looking, and new subversive ways of seeing and ‘deciphering’ the female body. If, like Bertha, we are locked up in the attic, let’s not jump off the roof, but go exploring the house at night.

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456 Ibid., p.4.
457 Ibid., p.18.
INTERIM THREE

In The ‘Living’ Room

Fig. 28. Jenny Keane, Dark Waters exhibition poster, 2011.
The Station on Belfast’s Queen Street is a fascinating building with an unusual past. Inspired by Florence Nightingale’s nursing efforts in other areas of the UK, it was funded and built as both a charitable and social endeavour by wealthy Belfast women to develop a children’s hospital in the 1870s. The quality of life in nineteenth century Belfast was so appalling, and the child mortality rate was so high that the Belfast Hospital for Sick Children was founded in 1873 in King Street, Belfast, but had to move to a new establishment, The Station, in 1878 to accommodate the ever increasing influx of young patients, and it catered exclusively for the care of poor children. The building itself was built specifically for the hospital’s needs – the ground floor contained the reception, visitor’s waiting room, doctor’s consultation room as well as the kitchen and laundry areas; the first floor consisted of the matron’s quarters, bathrooms and a large ward containing up to thirty beds; the second floor also had a similar sized ward alongside the nurses apartments and an operating theatre; in the attic floor, built into the eaves, there were five small rooms for the containment of infectious patients.

When the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast expanded in 1933, the children’s hospital moved to Grosvenor Road, Belfast, and the building on Queen Street was developed into a Royal Ulster Constabulary police station. This incarnation of the building lasted for 76 years until it was forced to close in 2000, but it left impressions on the building, including cells, built-in shelves and filing cabinets, barred windows and a large mesh gate construction at the entrance. When the art group, Platform Arts, took over The Station it had been abandoned for nine years, and the scars of misuse by trespassers had left the building in total disrepair. The plasterboard walls, stairs, lighting and doors were damaged, and the windows had been boarded up due to smashed and broken panes. The directors of Platform Arts Gallery and Studio group, headed by artist and curator Fiona Goggin, were given the opportunity to use the building, and set up the ‘Station Project.’ Envisioned as a performative space, the building was left as was, and artists were invited to ‘make work in the space or in response to it, leaving a trace of their activity behind thus creating a new layer of history to the building.’

Being a member of Platform Arts, I was given

459 Description of the original building from The Belfast Newsletter, 19th April 1879, p. 5.
460 Information from The Station Project, <www.stationproject.com> (accessed 20/10/11).
the opportunity to see the building at the beginning of the project and watch the progression of the curatorial projects take shape, redefining the building as each artist reinvented the architectural space in one way or another. I just had to do something there, but little did I know, my proposal for the space and subsequent curated exhibition would unfortunately be the last.461

Learning about the history of the building, the caring and nurturing space of the children’s hospital transformed into the RUC barracks, the harsh and austere space of incarceration (and purportedly savage violence462), led me to examine the role of the maternal in the decidedly patriarchal ‘law-of-the-father’. Where else would I turn but to the exploration of the concept of the abject (as discussed in Chapter One)? Or as Kristeva writes, ‘abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the

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461 Due to insurance problems, Platform Arts closed The Station Project in January 2011, and as I had already proposed and organised the exhibition for March of that year, I had to request the use of the building from the owners, and insure it myself without the help of Platform Arts.

462 According to some of the visitors to the exhibition, who had been arrested by the police and physically and brutally injured in the space.
immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be.\textsuperscript{463} But where was this liminal space between the feminine and the masculine in this building? I felt that the artworks I wished to curate had to explore the middle ground between its history of violence and nurture, but at the same time explore the specific physical quality of the building itself with its dark labyrinthine corridors and gloomy, frighteningly cold rooms. The Station may have looked and felt like a haunted house, which could have easily been parodied, but the effect I was trying to achieve was not one of a haunted fairground ride or tacky horror sequel with its cheap shock tactics, but rather a sickening descent into the space of the building and subsequently that liminal site of abjection: ‘subject and object push each other away, confront each other, collapse, and start again – inseparable, contaminated, condemned, at the boundary of what is assimilable, thinkable: abject.’\textsuperscript{464}

To do this led to some artistic license being taken with the works exhibited. Rather than simply pick a different room for each of the fourteen pieces (there were at least 40 rooms to choose from) and make them separate narratives in themselves, I asked the artists to allow me to position the work into the space of the building, experimentally curated into the framework of the architectural nuances, and inspired from the history of The Station itself – only one artist refused, and so her piece was displayed in a black painted room, devoid of any connection with the building. I wanted to create an environment where the work could be seen as both the individual pieces that they were, and at the same time as an imbricated layer of connection – both being within the building and creating a new sense of space at the same time. All of the artists agreed to be in the exhibition as they were interested in the relationship between their work and the exhibition’s themes, but due the very small budget, some of the installation artists forwent their usual practice of installation (i.e. Sue de Beer, Gabriela Fridriksdottir, and Cecily Brennan) and agreed to show their work as singular video pieces via either projector, TV monitor or flat-screen monitor. As I will discuss when speaking about individual videos, the pieces were positioned so that they absorbed some of the spatial uncanniness of the building itself, and began to relate to each other in a new sense of meaning through repetition of imagery and sound.

\textsuperscript{463} Kristeva, Powers of Horror, op. cit., p. 10.
\textsuperscript{464} ibid., p. 18.
Before I discuss the artists I chose, I wish to explain my initial reasoning for this exhibition, which I entitled Dark Waters. The exhibition presented twelve contemporary female artists working in video and/or video installation, the artists were: Sue de Beer (USA), Cecily Brennan (Ireland), Gabriela Fridriksdottir (Iceland), Anna Jermolaewa (Russia), Jenny Keane (Ireland), Sigalit Landau (Israel), Irene Loughlin (Canada), Breda Lynch (Ireland), Chloe Piene (USA), Mika Rottenberg (Argentina), Louise Shine (Ireland) and Catherine Street (Scotland). Each of these artists explore issues of horror and female sexuality in their work, and challenge the negative patriarchal perception of the feminine-as-monstrous, but at the same time, the work presented dealt with diverse topic ranging from adolescence, melancholia, war, body limits, sexuality, film theory, the Gothic, aging, and national identity. The following is an extract from my exhibition proposal to Platform Arts:

Žižek notes that ‘the main mode of politics today is fear’; through news broadcasts, people ‘safe’ in the comfort of their own homes succumb to imagery of war, terrorism, brutality, paedophilia, murder, otherness, and transgressions of culturally constructed notions of ‘law’. Via the media, fear, haunting, melancholia and abjection impose themselves on contemporary society. We are in a constant state of anxiety. In the last decade, and in a response to the ever increasingly destabilization of a sense of self, the art world has seen a rise in art practices surrounding death and horror. Artists such as Damien Hirst, Marc Quinn and Douglas Gordon evoke these concepts in challenging work that plays on society’s fears.

Yet some of the most prolific imagery in art history surrounds the image of the female body; myths including Eve, Lillith, Pandora, and Medusa place the site of patriarchal anxiety onto the feminine. Horror films in particular lasciviously localize the most amount of monstrousness onto and/or from the female protagonists. Judith Halberstam writes that in written horror stories and Gothic novels, ‘the reader can only imagine the dreadful spectacle of the monster and so its monstrosity is limited only by the reader’s imagination.’ Halberstam believes that the horror film monster will ‘always fail to be monstrous enough and horror therefore depends upon the explicit violation of female bodies as opposed to simply the sight of the monster.’ How do female artists respond to this?

While possibly contentious to use only female artists, the problem I had was that in the last five years exhibitions have abounded with issues surrounding death,

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466 Halberstam, Skin Shows, op. cit., p. 3.
melancholia, horror and monstrosity, 467 yet these exhibitions have not focused specifically on femininity or video art even though there are so many female artists exploring these concepts. And so Dark Waters dealt with the issues of the ‘monstrous feminine’ seen specifically through the eyes of the female video artist. As I mentioned in Chapter Three, I believe that recent female contemporary time-based art undermines the horror genre’s negative connotations of the female body. In a sense, like my spatial appropriations in arranging this thesis, The Station building became a metaphor for the liminality of the female body.

The Installation

At the heart of the building/body, Chloe Piene’s Blackmouth stood. I won’t go into too much detail about the piece as I spoke about it in detail in Chapter Three, but it was, in some ways, the most important video in the exhibition. Not only did I use a still of the video for the invitations, but I also positioned it in the centre of The Station so that it created a link between the two halves of the very large building. Blackmouth was projected on an enormous screen, 2.8 x 3.6 metres, at the end of the largest room in The Station, and the sound of the growling girl permeated down the corridors and through the entire exhibition. The sound affected most of the other pieces in the show, but rather than being distracting, the reverberation almost created an irregular heartbeat and movement within the building, and connected the space itself as well as the individual pieces together.

Beside Blackmouth, a very small room at the back of the building contained the first of Gabriela Friðriksdóttir’s video pieces. From Iceland, Gabriela 468 deals with mythical concepts, and her practice places itself between reality and dream. Gabriela works in drawing, sculpture and video installation. Her simple, fluid, and freehand line drawings are the basis of her


468 Icelandic names are patro- or matronymic. The concept of a surname (in terms of family lineage) does not exist. ‘Friðriksdóttir’ merely denotes that Gabriela’s father’s first name was Friðrik, and to use this as her name would be inappropriate, thus her name will be written as Gabriela throughout this thesis.
work and the subsequent videos and sculptural work stem from these quick but very detailed Indian ink sketches. The curator Raphael Gygax discusses that ‘although [the drawings] slowly come together as an organic weave and form visual sketches for her films, they ultimately attain a different level through sculpture and video, where a flowing exchange takes place.’ The piece contained in the room, installed on a small flat-screen monitor sitting on a windowsill, is called Operazione Pane (Bread Operation) (2004), and presents a round piece of dough on a plate. The hands of the artist appear and using her hands and kitchen implements she cuts, pokes and moulds the dough into a frightening face and then proceeds to gouge a space in the forehead of the bodiless creature, inserting black ink into the cavity.

![Image of the piece Operazione Pane](image)

**Fig. 30.** Gabriela Friðriksdóttir, Operazione Pane, 2004. Single channel video, 7:28 mins (looped), two video stills.

Threading a needle, the hands then suture the wound together with a thick white cord. The video begins again at this point. The piece itself is fascinating to watch, the anthropomorphic development of the dough is decidedly disturbing, and the use of the domestic material and equipment alludes to the horror of the homely space as discussed in Chapter Two. The relationship between the ink in her video work and the ink on her drawings is also important, the ink suggests a melancholic temperament – the black bile of the medieval melancholic humor. Yet this emotional state attempts to be hidden by the stitching, a denial that suggests, like The Station itself, a history of

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denied trauma. As I shall discuss later, the black liquid, which references the title Dark Waters, is a persistent reoccurrence in the exhibition.

Moving along the corridor, another work with dark liquid, although in a very different form, is presented in a room with barred windows. Sigalit Landau’s piece Barbed Hula (2000) is presented on a very large flat-screen monitor at waist height. On screen, Landau stands on a beach in Tel Aviv, Israel, completing, as the title would imply, a monstrous act of hula-hooping with a rounded piece of barbed wire. As the camera pans into her torso, the wounds that the wire is leaving on her body are revealed, and as we watch the gouged skin begins to bleed.

Fig. 31. Sigalit Landau, Barbed Hula, 2000. Single channel video, 1:52 mins (looped), two video stills.

The piece itself represents a political element – the Gaza strip is suggested, and notions of division, trespassing and war are evoked, as Landau notes: ‘The beach is the only calm and natural border Israel has.’ The cyclical nature of both the video and the barbed wire presents a repetitive and unending cycle of pain and horror. As Julian Stallabrass notes, political art practices have focused on the body because it creates ‘a cathartic enclosure and control of the knowledge of oppression so that the individual can register, limit and handle it, and also [points] outwards to a collective expression of what

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470 Which I would suggest derives from both the feminine and masculine incarnations of the space – the first environment being one of sickness and poverty attempting to be alleviated, and the second space of incarceration and brutality, in an attempt to enforce the law. Both provide traumatic experiences of the building itself.

is hidden or downplayed in mainstream political discourse.\(^{472}\) The video is, in Landau’s words, a ‘personal and senso-political act concerned with invisible, sub-skin borders, surrounding the body actively and endlessly.’\(^{473}\) It is no accident that the territorial wire wounds the stomach, the expandable space of progeny – a link between the maternal and the law, just like The Station building itself. I curated the piece into the room with the most extreme ‘wounding’ of the plaster walls so that the injured torso infuses into the building itself. I also positioned the large monitor so that the visitor’s body would be positioned at the same height, and as the same size, as Landau’s bleeding waist – a viscera(l) identification. As Kristeva notes: ‘The body’s inside ... shows up in order to compensate for the collapse of the border between inside and outside. It is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer guaranteed the integrity of one’s “own and clean self” but, scraped or transparent, invisible or taut, gave way before the dejection of its contents.’\(^{474}\) The Station invokes this abject permeable skin, the border for the ‘horror within,’ as the sound of each video piece bleeds, like the wounds from the barbed wire, into every crevice of the architecture.

Up the dark back stairs of the building we have to go now, the sounds of the other videos slowly being left behind, but the occasional deep grunt of Piene’s *Blackmouth* is still very audible. As we arrive at the top of the stairs, we have to go either left or right. Let’s go right. There are doors upon doors to pass, but a sign finally points towards the entrance into an empty room. At the end of the room is a secret entrance into another space. The floor of this space is painted in a black/white chequerboard effect and the walls are glowing strangely pink in the darkness of the room. There is a couch, a coffee table, a television monitor on the table (alluding to a domestic living room setting), and a strange sound of buzzing, like the loss of signal on an analogue television. As you sit down on the couch, watching the television, the image seems to move, or did it? The image itself recalls the BBC test card, the photograph of a young girl, surrounded by TV’s colour coding signals to check the correct configurations. This iconic image first went onto television in 1967, and denoted that viewing had ceased for the night – a rather rare occurrence on television.

\(^{473}\) Sigalit Landau, ‘Artist’s Statement,’ op. cit.
of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. The video piece being shown is in fact called Test Card (2006), but the work is very different from the original image shown on BBC. Using herself, the artist Louise Shine recreates the image of the test card, positioning herself in place of the girl, and tries to copy the smiling static image of the original child. Shine’s smile begins to fade, as her jaws become sore, but she persists. Her hand shakes as it clutches the chalk against the blackboard, but still awkwardly she attempts to hold the position of the still image. The original image, alluding to death as noted by Barthes, ‘respond[s] to the intrusion, in our modern society, of an asymbolic death, outside of religion, outside of ritual, a kind of abrupt dive into literal death. Life/Death; the paradigm is reduced to a single click, the one separating the initial pose from the final print.’\textsuperscript{475} Shine’s attempt at stillness alludes to the power of photography’s death, but at the same time, its moving, still alive, figure forms a very uncanny experience that sits on the liminal fence between death and life. As Laura Mulvey notes, stilled and delayed images in cinema create a tense duality between life and death in a frighteningly uncanny way, stillness conjures up the ‘frozen moment’ of the photograph but the presence of stillness ‘brings with it a threat to the credibility of the moving image itself, the ghostly presence of the still strip of film on which the illusion of movement depends.’\textsuperscript{476}

While humorous, with the protagonist trying to hide that she’s eating a chocolate bar, or sneaking out for a cigarette (leaving a sign saying ‘Back in 5 Minutes’), the 40-minute Test Card video that is relentlessly repeated and the

\textsuperscript{475} Barthes, Camera Lucida, op. cit., p. 86.
\textsuperscript{476} Mulvey, Death 24x a Second, op. cit., p. 155.
still image that Shine constantly attempts to recreate plays with the concepts of past and present, so that ‘time cannot be grasped’ and time returns as a double of life, and becomes as Mulvey notes, ‘brushed by death.’ This looping, bodily and historical trace reiterates the spatial and experiential elements of the building, alluding to the fusing of past and present in The Station – like the building itself, the video creates an infinite loop of uncanny temporal shudders.

Leaving Shine’s Test Card, and turning back on ourselves, passing the entrance to the stairs and following the long corridor, we arrive at Sue de Beer’s earliest video piece, Making Out With Myself (1997). As the name would imply, the video contains the artist kissing herself in a very strange and low-fi form of CGI. Not wanting to touch the architecture itself, I did not do anything to rooms in The Station, but curated the work into what was there – working with the space. For example, Louise Shine’s Test Card was positioned into the chequered and pink room, which was created for a previous installation, because the colours matched the patterns and squares on the video itself – I wanted the image on screen to echo the room, alluding to an almost enveloping embryonic space. In contrast, Sue de Beer’s video was positioned

Fig. 33. Sue de Beer, Making Out With Myself, 1997. Single channel video, 2:48 mins, video still.

477 ibid., p. 196.
on a TV monitor on a white plinth into a room that seemed incongruous to the image; this white, clean room was covered in smeared bloody handprints from a previous installation. Not only were the handprints red and horrific, the fake-blood that was used in the original installation was actually made from strong smelling sugar syrup that generated a disgustingly sweet and sickly scent in the space. I liked the dichotomous quality of the sweet smell with the monstrous smudges in the room, because, as I mentioned in Chapter Three, de Beer likes to position horror and saccharine childhood imagery together. In the video itself, the sensual but uncanny image of the artist kissing herself further accentuated these incongruities. When meeting yourself, or more uncannily, your doppelgänger, your first thought would not generally be to kiss! Another strange layer of the uncanny element of de Beer’s installation in The Station was where the room was positioned; I had intentionally blocked the rest of the corridor between this area and the next work, so that you could hear another video piece while being in the room, but could not see it. The audience had to listen to the video but not connect the sound and image until they went back to the central area, which housed Piene’s Blackmouth, and go up the stairs to the other side of the building.

And so, this is what has to be done now. Back down the previous stairs, passing Sigalit Landau’s, Gabriela Friðriksdóttir’s and Chloe Piene’s work, and up the stairs to the landing of the first floor. The first room encountered contains a video piece by Irish artist Cecily Brennan; at 61 she is the oldest artist in the exhibition. I mention this because her video piece is decidedly centred on age. The high-definition projected video, entitled Black Tears (2010), contains an elderly woman in the centre of a bright red background, who is sporadically crying. The woman is in such a traumatic state that the ebbs and flow of her trauma can be palpably felt; when at her most harrowed, her crying, screaming, and moaning could be heard throughout the entire Station building. Like Mika Rottenberg’s protagonists discussed in Chapter Three, the woman in Brennan’s video has been paid to perform; she is the well-known Irish actress Britta Smith. With this in mind, the audience can possibly see the waving flow of tears as the actor is collecting her thoughts, or preparing herself for the next onslaught of howls. But at the same time, Brennan is insistent on informing both the viewing audience and the press that Smith died shortly after performing the piece. So perhaps, as Brennan intimates, the woman knew she was about to die, and that is why she cried so much. I know that this is the case,
as I met a family friend of Britta Smith’s at the opening of Dark Waters, but Brennan’s conception of the piece was obviously not related to the actor’s death. Pushing Brennan’s inapplicable suggestions aside, the image of the woman is still extremely emotive. Her cyclical sobbing is further accentuated when, halfway through the video, her tears begin to turn black. It is, again, the black liquid implied by my titling of the show – the melancholic humor.

As Kristeva notes in Black Sun, mentioned in Chapter Three, the melancholic woman loses all sense of language due to her mourning for the mother:

the hatred I bear her is not orientated toward the outside but is locked up within myself. There is no hatred, only an implosive mood that walls itself in and kills me secretly, very slowly, through permanent bitterness, bouts of sadness, or even lethal sleeping pills that I take in smaller or greater quantities in the dark hope of meeting … no one.478

These eruptions of black tears are rivulets of the mother, seeping out of the body into the space of the video, and through the screaming of inarticulate language, into the feminised building itself. My positioning of the video in the far end of the second largest room in the building creates a haunting and (maternally) haunted echo within the vast room and throughout The Station.

478 Kristeva, Black Sun, op. cit., p. 28-9. Ellipsis in original.
Walking out of Brennan’s room and turning left discloses another door that the audience is permitted to enter (the doors that you cannot enter are marked with an ‘x’). This room reveals itself to be an empty cupboard, with a strange broken window leading the audience’s vision into a large but darkened room that cannot be entered. In the centre of the room a small video, my piece Breath, seems to be floating in mid air, as the supports for the 15” monitor are hidden in the darkness. The video shows a young woman floating under the surface of water. As the audience watches, the woman emerges from the liquid and takes a deep breath, and then returns under the surface again, repeating the action in an interminable loop. The timing is in slow motion and the peaceful image is interrupted only when the protagonist breaks the surface of the water.

Fig. 35. Jenny Keane, Breath, 2008. Single channel video, 3:32 mins (looped), video still.

The peaceful submerged portrait discusses pre-Symbolic desire – beautiful serenity and a lack of unnecessary verbal communication, yet the need to breathe (which represents speech) is an obligatory removal from desire into reality. I positioned the video behind the window of the installation to mirror the action taking place on screen – the audience put their heads through the window frame to view the piece, and the sound of the breath is so
extremely deep, that it shook the window and emanated from both the room and the cupboard into the corridor, mingling with the haunting howls from Brennan’s *Black Tears*.

Backing out of the cupboard and up another flight of stairs, the audience is greeted with another striking, but familiar reverberation merging with the other noises on the corridor. As the strange architecture of the building reveals itself, we are back on the same floor as the video pieces by Louise Shine and Sue de Beer, but at the opposite side of the blocked corridor, hearing and now seeing the same ghostly video that was aurally encountered earlier – an uncanny acoustic repetition. This video, Gabriela Friðriksdóttir’s second piece entitled *Melankólia* (2004), is positioned on a small monitor at the end of a long solitary corridor at the top of the third flight of stairs. The sound of Piene’s *Blackmouth* and Brennan’s *Black Tears* can be clearly heard but are amalgamated with the stark violin noises emanating from Gabriela’s piece, creating an eerie and abject cacophony of corporeal repeated beats and rhythms. As Kristeva notes: ‘The abject, mimed through sound and meaning, is repeated. Getting rid of it is out of the question …one does not get rid of the impure; one can, however, bring it into being a second time, and differently from the original impurity.’

![Fig. 36. Gabriela Friðriksdóttir, Melankólia, 2004. Single channel video, 7:10 mins (looped), video still.](image)

In *Melankólia*, an anthropomorphic roll of dough lies on a table, resembling a horrific Frankenstein’s monster woman. As the video progresses, close ups of the hands of the object reveals that, like the monster in Shelly’s book, the creature starts to come alive, slowly wiggling its fingers, and then

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larger movements until it is jerking all over the table, the movements recalling the hysteric. Another character appears, dressed in rough fabric loosely stitched with hay. Over her clothes, she wears a prosthetic pregnant bump sculpted from plaster, and a pale pink headpiece moulded and shaped like a brain. The character performs what appears to be surgery on the dough character, cutting the dough with rudimentary tools and sticks, filling its abdomen with black Indian ink. The actions done to the dough, a common element Gabriela’s work, almost repeats her other piece Operazione Pane, so that within the exhibition the uncanny doubling is exposed again. As the creature rises from the table, the ‘pregnant’ character and this human-bread-hybrid interact with each other in an increasingly surreal manner. Shovelling black ink around the apparently domestic but primitive and dark room, the two participants cover themselves in the ink, focusing much of the attention on covering the plaster pregnancy prosthesis – alluding to Kristeva’s melancholic child. The black ink drips onto a canvas on the ground. The main character begins to create an almost abstract expressionist painting from the ink by pouring the black liquid and stamping the ink into the canvas with her feet. The narrative is fractured so that elements appear and disappear which creates a lack of linearity; and strange objects and characters – like a double bass playing, dough-faced creature – materialize and vanish. Here Gabriela explores the female body, similar to an anatomy lesson in reverse, (re)constructing the female body by literally putting a dough body together. The dough is a morphing and pliable substance, with connotations of baking and domestic labour, yet its state of wobbly and unstable uncooked-ness implies liminality, and positions the female body in a potent state of flux. My installation of the video at the end of the very long and dark corridor and the sound that travels throughout the exhibition accentuates this in-betweenness.

The audience has to back up upon themselves, to leave Gabriela’s video and return to the stairs, where two other videos are located, the doors of which are facing each other. The left-hand room presents Breda Lynch’s video After Rebecca (2006), which I will discuss more thoroughly in Chapter Four, and the right-hand room displays Catherine Street’s video Pendulum (2008). Both videos are double channel (but presented on single screens), and the placement of the rooms, facing each other, alludes to this, so as to create another sense of doubling. Lynch’s video is simply presented on a very large flat-screen monitor on a plinth, but Street’s is shown in an altogether more
peculiar installation. I placed the large TV monitor into the base of a built-in cupboard in the room so that the screen faced upwards at a steep angle, and the audience had to put their heads into the cupboard to view the work. The screen presents two images that seem exactly the same; the left channel shows Street cutting herself and spreading her blood on a sheet of glass that is held up to the camera, and the right channel repeats the image with a white substance resembling cream or milk. The video subverts the abjection of these liquids in contemporary cinematic experience, in an attempt to rupture the traditional image of femininity in film, literally coating the conventional cinematic lens so that any image of the female body is only seen through these bodily fluids.

![Image of Catherine Street's Pendulum, 2008](image)

*Fig. 37. Catherine Street, Pendulum, 2008. Double channel video, 1:27 mins (looped), video still.*

Through challenging the fourth wall, the border between the skin of the video and reality is ruptured.

Along with sight-clouding dizziness, nausea makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. "I" want none of that element, sign of their desire; "I" do not want to listen, "I" do not assimilate it, "I" expel it. But since the food is not an "other" for "me," who am only in their desire, I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish myself.  

Kristeva’s words are epitomized in this video; the disgust of the female body and the abject food loathing that establishes the self, denoting a rhythmic, pendulous and perilous journey. And the position within the cupboard that

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480 ibid., p. 3.
contains the video places the audience simultaneously within the space of the building and within the video itself.

Exiting Street’s video and just before going up the stairs to the attic, the audience encounters Mika Rottenberg’s video Mary’s Cherries in a small, darkened room. Having spoken about this piece in Chapter Three, and due to the fact that the artist requested her own installation (a blacked out space with no architectural elements which strangely contrasts to her usual installation of the work), I will move on to the rest of the video pieces. At the top of the winding staircase, Irene Loughlin’s video Fintan (2004) is situated in the attic room with sloping eaves, and the monitor is located between the walls of the dormer window. In the video, Loughlin positions a fish eye in her mouth and, for over two minutes, she continually attempts to keep the slippery object in place.

Fig. 38. Irene Loughlin, Fintan, 2004. Single channel video, 2:02 mins (looped), video still.

The wiggling eye stares at the audience, inducing disgust and an uncomfortable sense of being stared at by this ‘thing.’ The Irish myth of the Salmon of Knowledge is invoked through the image of the fish and the use of its name Fintan, a literal allusion by Loughlin, as the Canadian artist heard the story on her visits to Ireland. The power of knowledge is in the eye, in the power of vision. But what is just as powerful and disturbing is the large cold-sore on
Loughlin’s mouth; a white and sickly bodily protrusion, mirroring the abject quality of the fish’s eye. This grotesque somatic blister repositions the abhorrence and authority of the eye into an abject disgust and power of the body. Simultaneously, the room in which the video was installed had contained raw rotting fish from a previous Station project, so its disgusting stench lingered and linked to the video, engulfing the audience as they entered the space. The room itself was, as I discussed above, the attic space that was used to contain infection, but being positioned into the building itself, the abject quality of the video could not be enclosed. I wanted the eye itself to be situated at the top of the building, and so it sat in the attic, as part of the window, surveying the rest of the building/body; it moved and scrutinised the audience as they passed, literally recapitulating the corporeality of the space.

The final artist to be discussed is Anna Jermolaewa. One of her videos is positioned across the hall from Irene Loughlin, and her second piece is in the cellar. Jermolaewa’s video pieces are positioned at the top and bottom of the building, ‘bookending’ the Dark Waters exhibition. In the attic, the video is entitled Curvaceous (2002), and deals with the monstrosity of the female body.

![Fig. 39. Anna Jermolaewa, Curvaceous, 2002. Single channel video, 2:06 mins (looped), two video stills.](image)

The naked body itself is fragmented into short cuts that are never more than three seconds each. The video shows a small red toy car sliding up and down the contours of the body, doing ‘wheelies’ around nipples and getting caught in pubic hair and navels until it has to reverse. While obviously childish and humorous, the video’s sound denotes a very different experience to the innocent imagery – the noise of a real car is juxtaposed with the toy and the image suggests that it is a sense of scale that we are dealing with, alluding to
the 1950s horror film *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* (Nathan Hertz, 1958). Through this identification the body becomes enormous, so large that it cannot fit the frame of its projection in the attic. Like the spatial ‘corporalisation’ of the other works in the exhibition, the large female body in *Curvaceous* is so huge that it could be the size of the building itself...

Down in the cellar, Jermolaewa’s second video, entitled *...go...go...go...go...* (2002), has been playing away, endlessly repeating the same line of a song over and over again. The song is by the Vengaboys and is called ‘Boom, Boom, Boom, Boom!!!’ – the lyrics themselves are important to the video and its installation, ‘Boom, Boom, Boom, Boom; I want you in my room; let’s spend the night together; forever in my room.’ The sound is layered and repeated continually throughout the video, sometimes splintering into incoherence and, at other times, piercingly loud. The sound itself seems so ridiculous as the Vengaboys were a tacky 90s ‘Europop’ group that had no musical talent, but may have had a slight cult following! They must have had enough of a following because the music in the video is emanating from three wind-up children’s dolls that Jermolaewa found in a souvenir shop.

In the video itself, the dolls are tied up with ropes with their backs to each other on a small bamboo raft that is floating down a river estuary into the sea and propelled by the mechanical jerking movements of the dolls themselves. Each doll repeats the song, in a slightly off-timed audio so that there is a continually haunting echo to the music. What is incongruous to the seemingly sweet video is that, not only are the dolls floating out into sea (which is a metaphor of female sexuality), but also the overly sexual nature of the song...
is quite disturbing, especially as it is emitted from a childish toy. There is a strange allusion to sexual abuse, and when the video Curvaceous and its childish intimations are taken into consideration, both videos become extremely, but fascinatingly, disconcerting. Accentuating this strange and dichotomous video, I installed ...go...go...go...go... into the cell of The Station, positioning the small TV monitor on the cell’s concrete ‘bed.’ Even though the video, like Jermolaewa’s other work, is strangely funny, its installation in Dark Waters creates a frightening and encroaching space and becomes a looping and liminal environment of disgust and desire – as the song repeats, so does the abjection: ‘forever in my room, forever in my room, forever in my room, forever in my room.’

Walking back down the stairs and down to the cellar to find Jermolaewa’s second piece, the audience has to retrace their steps, hearing the bawling woman of Brennan’s Black Tears, the low-pitched breath emanating from my work, and the guttural screams from Piene’s Blackmouth. This form of remembering and automatic recurring movement in the space infers a sense of traumatic repetition – or repetition compulsion to quote Freud. In fact, all the video work in the exhibition suggest this anxiety. Yet the escaping voices of the videos in the building provide a sense of movement in space, so that the sound is both inside and outside the specific environment of each installation. As I mentioned above, the historical uses of The Station explore the relationship between places of masculinity and spaces of femininity – and the sense of being ‘locked up’ is evoked in both. Through my curation of the exhibition I have attempted to explore this idea of being locked up, alluding to the space of the chora, a space which, as I mentioned in Chapter One, can be seen as both confinement and freedom; the chora is the place where ‘the subject is both generated and annihilated, the site where it both assumes a pulsional and rhythmic consistency and is dissolved as a psychic or social coherence.’ Yet, as Kaja Silverman notes, the chora could be regressive as it merely positions the mother inside it, without an ability to transcend it and this becomes a ‘backward journey.’ What the chora must do is ‘point forward as well as backward – accommodate transformation and return.’ In The Acoustic Mirror, through an analysis of Kristeva’s study of language and the feminine,

482 ibid., p. 125.
Silverman notes that both Freud and Kristeva see that ‘to speak is thus necessarily to occupy a “male” position; even the maternal voice can be heard only through the male voice,’ a concept denying the mother cultural recognition. To create an alternative form of choric space, Silverman points to a sonorous environment that incorporates the mother’s voice. Rather than reducing femininity to a lack of language, the maternal voice must be ‘simultaneously “on” and “off,” “inside” and “outside,”’ apart from the female subject and a part of her. Speaking about film, Silverman’s concepts are two dimensional and narrative based, yet her spatial visualisations become very important to installation; as I mentioned in Chapter Three, the use of spatiality within video installation provides a connection to the body that cannot be achieved in film or single channel video. As if speaking about installation, Silverman believes that the process of incorporating the maternal voice becomes a ‘choric voice, tracing the spatial boundaries of the sonorous envelope’ becoming labyrinthine or maze-like so that the female voice can travel within, around and outside it.

In Dark Waters, I have attempted to create this physical and spatial environment that explores an intricate entanglement – a choric space. Pushing the concept of the installation to its limits, by creating the entire exhibition as a form of expanded installation, and through imbricating the voices of the corporeal videos within the space, I have endeavoured to create an original form of curatorial practice. To work with the other artists’ pieces to create something new – a site of space and time that is mediated through sound, it becomes both incorporeal and bodily, permanent and transient, separate and connected, and subsequently opens up a rhythmic and liminal labyrinth.

\[^{483}\text{ibid., p. 113.}\]
\[^{484}\text{ibid., p. 140.}\]
\[^{485}\text{ibid., p. 131.}\]
Sarah: Are you making a pass at me, Mrs. Blaylock?
Miriam: [Call me] Miriam.
Sarah: Miriam….
Miriam: Not that I’m aware of, Sarah.\footnote{Transcript from \textit{The Hunger}, Tony Scott, 1983.}

\textbf{THE HUNGER}

The Hunger is not a very typical vampire film.\footnote{An early draft of this chapter was presented as a conference paper: Jenny Keane, ‘The Problem of Representability: Lesbian Depiction in the Horror Film and Contemporary Art,’ at the conference ‘Private Lives, Public Lives: New Research Across the Disciplines,’ University of Brighton, Brighton, 2010. The paper was also presented at the ‘Second Global Conference of Evil, Women and the Feminine,’ Michna Palace, Prague, Czech Republic, 2010. The conference transcript was subsequently published in the eBook: Andrea Ruthven and Gabriela Madlo (eds.), \textit{Illuminating the Dark Side: Evil, Women and the Feminine}, Inter-Disciplinary Press, Oxford, 2010.} Based on the novel by Whitley Strieber, the film deals with an archaic vampiric character Miriam, played by Catherine Deneuve, who preys on the blood of the young. Searching for an ‘eternal’ companion, she infects one person at a time with her blood so as to make another pseudo-vampire. Yet, after hundreds of years, the effects of Miriam’s blood dissolves and each companion’s body disintegrates – but they cannot die while she is still alive. So she locks their crumbling bodies in her attic and moves on to another (mostly) willing victim. The film opens when Miriam’s companion, John, played by David Bowie, is starting to age and deteriorate; behind his back, she searches for another partner, and finds Sarah (Susan Sarandon), a scientist working on age defying treatments, in the hope that Sarah might be able to live forever. In its most famous scene, Miriam seduces Sarah and they drink each other’s blood while having sex. When Sarah realises what has happened, that she had been infected by Miriam and will become a...
vampire, she tries to kill herself but this action actually causes Miriam to disintegrate. Sarah subsequently replaces Miriam as the head vampire. (I’d just like to note that in the novel the finale is very different. When Sarah falls unconscious after her attempted suicide, Miriam manages to lock her up in the attic among the other companions/victims and continues on the search for new blood.)

The film’s opening credits are the only allusion to the word vampire in the entire film – the Gothic rock band Bauhaus perform their hit song Bela Lugosi’s Dead which is a reference to horror actor Bela Lugosi who was the first person in Hollywood to play a vampire in the film Dracula (Tod Browning, 1931). Lugosi’s portrayal of this fictional creature became the standard vampire characterisation in film, and this reference to his death in the song seems to suggest that the previous image of the vampire will be radically changed in The Hunger film. And it is. Based in the 1980s, the film dispenses with the traditional images of vampirism, and instead presents a group of yuppy-styled undead characters, without teeth, that invite young socialites back to their swanky ‘pad’ for parties, subsequently killing them with lavish 18ct gold jewellery. The storyline is more about the vampires than their victims, and the fascination lies with ‘another species, living right here all along. An identical twin.’

What remains the same, however, is the depiction of the lesbian vampire. She has travelled from the legends of both real and fictional women, and has embedded herself so much in the culture that she is, and will be, infinitely visualised and parodied in film and television, as Andrea Weiss notes: ‘The scope and persistence of this phenomenon should not be underestimated; outside of male pornography, the lesbian vampire is the most persistent lesbian image in the history of the cinema.’ Historically, seventeenth century’s Countess Elizabeth Balthory from Transylvania could be seen as the first real-life figure of the lesbian vampire; her predatory sexual nature alongside a legendary thirst for the blood of young virgins to drink and bathe in provided many authors, including J.T. Sheridan le Fanu and Bram Stoker, with a fascinating serial killer on which to base their vampire stories – when looking at the facts, the myth that Dracula was based on Vlad the Impaler is inaccurate as Raymond McNally notes in his book Dracula Was A Woman. While the ‘virgin blood baths’ that were accredited with keeping Balthory young-looking were

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probably fiction, Balthory’s aristocratic background made her murders and sexual sadism so scandalous that her trial was suppressed for over a hundred years. Like most vampire stories, The Hunger reiterates Bathory’s story, but it positions her need for youth not just in her own body, but also in her human companions. It is her loneliness that keeps Miriam hunting for blood.

It is not surprising that the vampire myth is feminine. The relationship between blood and femininity is a long one, as Kristeva notes:

On the one hand there is bloodless flesh (destined for man) and on the other, blood (destined for God). Blood, indicating the impure, takes on the “animal” seme of the previous opposition and inherits the propensity for murder of which man must cleanse himself. But blood, as a vital element, also refers to women, fertility and the assurance of fecundation. It thus becomes a fascinating semantic crossroads, the propitious place for abjection, where death and femininity, murder and procreation, cessation of life and vitality all come together.

Alluding to Kashrut as I discussed in Chapter Two, Kristeva sees the drinking of blood as entirely abject, not merely as disgusting but as profane and murderously monstrous — and feminine. Barbara Creed develops Kristeva’s theory and discusses blood as a reference to the abject nature of menstruation, and simultaneously to the deflowered virgin. The two forms of feminine bleeding, menstrual and hymenal, link to sexual awakening, and position the girl as a threatening figure: ‘Woman’s womb is a site of terror because it bleeds; it is the blood which flows from the inside to the outside of woman’s body that is viewed as abject.’ But the blood is not the only abject quality of the lesbian vampire; she is monstrous in both her vampirism and in her sexuality, as Andrea Weiss notes, she ‘operates in the sexual rather than the supernatural realm.’ Bonnie Zimmerman believes that the feminist movement inspired the lesbian vampire’s return to cinema in the 1970s, because men ‘felt secure enough in their power’ to ‘flirt with lesbianism and female violence against men.’ But Weiss believes that the opposite was true, men were so frightened and threatened of women’s independence and power that they created the lesbian vampire just to destroy her: ‘The lesbian vampire provokes

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491 Kristeva, Powers of Horror, op. cit., p. 96.
492 Creed, The Monstrous-Feminine, op. cit., p. 66.
493 Weiss, Vampires and Violets, op. cit., p. 84.
and articulates anxieties in the heterosexual male spectator, only for the film to quell these anxieties and reaffirm his maleness through the vampire’s ultimate destruction. It is, as discussed before, ‘a ritual of purification that permits the spectator to wallow vicariously in the normally taboo forms of behaviour before restoring order.’ The sexual freedom that the lesbian monster achieves only appears to be liberating – in fact, as Linda Williams notes, ‘the titillating attention given to the expression of women’s desire [in horror] is directly proportional to the violence perpetrated against women.’ The expressions of sexuality merely accentuate the violence, connecting scopophilic and sadistic pleasure simultaneously in the image of the female vampire. Williams believes that the horror film allows the ‘expression of female sexual potency and desire,’ but it does so ‘only to punish her for this very act, only to demonstrate how monstrous female desire can be.’ Unlike the book, The Hunger film reiterates this issue; Sarah replaces Miriam as the vampire so that the vampiricism continues – but the final scene sees Sarah living with a man, so that her most monstrous quality, her lesbianism, is erased. This film poignantly makes clear that the vampire’s blood-sucking transgressions are nothing in comparison to her frightening lesbianism.

It is this menacing lesbian figure that is addressed here. In a similar analysis to Chapter Three, this chapter focuses on contemporary video practice that explores the representation of the lesbian. As I noted in other chapters, the politics of representing femininity is contingent on a premise of patriarchy. The feminine is presented as ‘lack’, as the binary opposite of the masculine – ‘she’ has no image except in relation to the male. But what about the lesbian? As Terry Castle notes: ‘By refusing to undergo the symbolic emasculation that Western society demands of its female members – indeed depends on – the woman who desires another woman has always set herself apart (if only by default) as outlaw and troublemaker.’ How can this femininity that does not assimilate into a masculine-feminine binarism be depicted? It is the image of the lesbian that needs to be explored.

495 Weiss, Vampires and Violets, op. cit., p. 90.
497 Williams, ‘When the Woman Looks,’ op. cit., p. 32.
498 ibid., p. 32-33.
Early Lesbian Art Practice

The most acknowledged lesbian artists include Deborah Bright, Della Grace (now known as Del LaGrace Volcano) and Catherine Opie, whose work from the late eighties challenged the structures of lesbian representation. While these artists are well known for their socio-political practices that make aware the issues of a previously under-represented minority, in a contemporary art field today their work has been perceived as documentary and clichéd. In some sense, I agree with this, but only in retrospect. At the time in which the work was made, their practices were challenging, controversial, politically charged, and thought provoking. But what I’m not attempting to do here is to provide a chronological approach to lesbians in visual art, or deny that work from earlier lesbian artists is not relevant and poignant to the issues of lesbian representation. Rather, I wish to explore the representations of the lesbian in recent contemporary art, alongside its increasing invisibility and liminality.

Yet, to put the contemporary practice into context I wish to first explore two earlier artists working in the Eighties and Nineties to examine what their work needed to do – their practices attempted to provide images of lesbians that have been formerly excluded from mainstream cultural representation, because: ‘In the wake of liberation movements of the 1970s, being visible and heard was equated with empowerment.’ For example, Catherine Opie sees her practice as a responsibility to her community, to document her life and the lives of people with similar, excluded, lifestyles. Rather than analyse the images of her community-based, or drag-king imagery here, I would like to look at a self-portrait taken in 1993 because it stands out as her most famous photograph, and the most powerful. This piece, entitled Self-Portrait/Cutting, is a photograph of Opie’s back on which a childish stick drawing is meticulously carved by a scalpel into her flesh. The bleeding drawing depicts two happy stick-women holding hands, with the sun shining and a cheerful little house in the background. The use of the self-portrait style that is inverted, with her back to the camera, alludes to sexual ‘inversion,’ and transposes the traditional portrait format and the female nude in an attempt to both represent herself and denote her supposed transgressive nature – both physically, as a large butch woman, and sexually. The photograph evokes the imagery that she is well known for, representations of the SM/queer community, but it also

500 Mey, Art and Obscenity, op. cit., p. 87.
represents something more. The permanence of the gouged skin presents a trace, a perpetual desire to be seen, and a physical and painful desire for her sexual orientation and lifestyle to be accepted – it is about visibility.

Fig. 41. Catherine Opie, Self-Portrait/Cutting, 1993. C-type print, 100.7 x 76.1 cm.

In a similar form of desire, but using a very different process, Deborah Bright’s series of photographs, entitled Dream Girls (1989-90), focus on the lack of lesbian imagery in mainstream Hollywood cinema. In her series, Bright collages her butch image into film stills, challenging the repression of lesbian presence in Hollywood. As Patricia White notes, Bright inserts her figure into the images to disrupt the ‘clichéd quality of the movie still’ and literalises the ‘common understanding of identification as “seeing oneself in the picture”’.\(^{501}\) As discussed before in Chapters Two and Three, the traditional format of identification in film is based on suture, and creates an identification between the male spectator and the male protagonist; Bright’s insertion of herself repositions the identification. Instead of passively watching the film, which is

what is believed women do, Bright actively identifies with the male characters and places herself as the male.

**Fig. 42.** Deborah Bright, *Untitiled from Dream Girls Series*, 1989-90. Silver gelatin print, 20.3 x 25.4 cm.

Furthermore, through her butch persona, she challenges the supposedly fixed nature of gender. As Alisa Solomon notes:

> Adopting and often transforming traits traditionally associated with men, butches threaten masculinity more than they imitate it; they colonize it. ...Rather than copying some “original” image of masculinity, butches point to the embarrassing fact that there is no such thing: masculinity is an artifice no matter who performs it.502

Destabilizing the image of masculinity is Bright’s intention, but at the same time she explores the desires of queer film audiences to be able to identify with the traditionally heteronormative roles of classic cinema. Queer protagonists had been banned from public viewing through the cinema, as Doty notes: ‘We’re so starved, we go see anything because it’s better than nothing. It’s a compromise. It’s a given degree of alienation.’503 Again, like Opie, the work attempts to make visible the lesbian body.


The Apparitional Lesbian

As I mentioned above, there is something in the work of some earlier lesbian art practice that in certain ways make it clichéd – perhaps it is their focus on representing the lesbian body, on visibility, that allow the images to be passed over and relegated to nothing more than documentary-style representation. While discussing women’s art practice in Chapter Two, I talked about the construction of the phallocentric binary, masculine-feminine, and that early feminist art practices were stuck in this binary because their focus on polarity ‘tames and binds [the] anxiety’ of difference. In a similar sense, the early lesbian practice of searching for a positive image of the lesbian unintentionally placed themselves into the negative binary of heterosexual-homosexual, and merely reiterates the already presumed difference. How do contemporary lesbian artists navigate around this binary?

Before I begin to look at contemporary artists dealing with this issue, I firstly wish to analyse the traditional representations of lesbians. Terry Castle’s book, The Apparitional Lesbian, is a literary, historical, and biographical analysis of lesbians in modern culture. In her introduction, Castle apologetically writes about her relationship with lesbian theory, she claims that she had intended this book to be an anthology of ‘ghosts in Western culture after the Enlightenment,’ but beginning to write the book led her to realise that the politics of lesbianism had always been a ‘phantom’ of her scholarly work, subversively implied but never explicated, and this fear of discussing lesbian representation was because of the shrouded figure of the lesbian in culture. Castle asks:

Why is it so difficult to see the lesbian - even when she is there, quite plainly, in front of us? In part because she has been ‘ghosted’ – or made to seem invisible – by culture itself. It would be putting it mildly to say that the lesbian represents a threat to patriarchal protocol: Western civilization has for centuries been haunted by a fear of ‘women without men’ – of women indifferent or resistant to male desire.

Castle argues that one of the ways patriarchal culture has dealt with the lesbian, particularly in literature and popular culture, is to turn her into a ghostly figure. Through analyses of classical literary texts including Daniel Defoe’s The

504 Gallop, Feminism and Psychoanalysis, op. cit., p. 93.
505 Castle, The Apparitional Lesbian, op. cit., p. 3.
506 ibid., p. 5.
Apparition of Mrs. Veal (1706) and Henry James’ The Bostonians (1886), she defends her premise – that ‘the lesbian remains a kind of “ghost-effect”’ in the cinema world of modern life: elusive, vaporous, difficult to spot – even when she is there, in plain view, mortal and magnificent, at the centre of the screen. Some may deny she exists at all.”\textsuperscript{507} Thus many films, the horror film in particular, epitomise phallocentric and heteronormative ‘ideals’, while inextricably adumbrating and portraying the lesbian character as elusive, horrific, and Other. Castle believes that most classical representations of lesbians were presented in this negative light, for example, Baudelaire’s Les Fleurs du Mal (1857), but readers are so eager to observe a lesbian reference, as these representations are ‘so few in number,’ that even negative depictions are still given places in the lesbian literary tradition. It is this negativity however, that alludes to the fact that the lesbian is so powerfully feared by patriarchal culture, as Castle believes that ‘the very frequency with which the lesbian has been ‘apparitionalized’ in the Western imagination also testifies to her peculiar cultural power.’ Subsequently, Castle writes that ‘only something palpable – at a deeper level – has the capacity to ‘haunt’ us so thoroughly.’\textsuperscript{508}

There is a light at the end of this ghostly tunnel however; Castle demonstrates the point, which I wish to apply to the visual artists in this chapter, that there is an abject power to the apparitional lesbian. As she has been made invisible in and by culture, her strength lies in her threatening potential omnipresence. Castle duly writes:

If it is true that the first stage of recognition is denial, then the denial of lesbianism – through its fateful association with the spectral – was also the first stage of its cultural recognition. In the same way that the act of negation, in Freud’s words ‘frees the thinking process from repression’, so the spectral metaphor provides the very imagery, paradoxically, through which the carnal truth of lesbianism might be rediscovered and reclaimed by lesbian writers.\textsuperscript{509}

If the ghostly character is so frightening to patriarchy it is because in its inherent invisibility, the apparition becomes ‘endlessly capable of “appearing.”’\textsuperscript{510} And this subtlety of female homosexuality is its power. Looking at The Hunger, Miriam’s feminine style and marriage to a man presents the invisibility of the apparent lesbian, but her veiled ‘love that dare not speak its name’ is

\textsuperscript{507} ibid., p. 2.  
\textsuperscript{508} ibid., p. 7.  
\textsuperscript{509} ibid., p. 63.  
\textsuperscript{510} ibid.
powerfully present, and is epitomised in the question, ‘Are you making a pass at me, Mrs. Blaylock?’ The most frightening element of Miriam is her invisibility, because even the obviously willing victim is uncertain about the lesbian vampire’s monstrous advances.

Lisa Byrne

In male homosexuality there has always been codified systems of recognition for identifying each other for safety from homophobic abuse and police (when it was illegal in Western culture). Examples include 1960s Polari slang in London, and the Hanky Code from 1970s New York. Using the Hanky Code, gay men would wear a particular colour handkerchief in their jeans to denote ‘top’ or ‘bottom’ inclination as well as bedroom preferences. For example, a black hanky in the left pocket would denote hardcore SM, and placed in the right pocket it would indicate a masochistic tendency; lavender hankies would be for drag queens; and red would suggest a penchant for fisting. But lesbian codes were not typical – Egyptian emblems like the labrys or the ankh (which is used as the murder weapon, attached to a necklace, in The Hunger), as well as the double Venus symbol and reappropriations of the black triangle from Nazi concentration camps are occasionally used. In terms of demeanour, unlike the stereotypical overt camp qualities of some male homosexuals, lesbian identification is difficult. Yet it is this difficulty that makes it interesting – the artist Lisa Byrne’s Taxi Trilogy (2009) implies that the sense of subtle suggestion is the lesbian’s speciality. Byrne is a London-based artist born in Belfast, and the three-part single channel video presents three very different images of Northern Ireland. The piece is probably best known for the third section, Stand up and Cry Like a Man, created by filming taxi drivers in Belfast and interviewing them with reference to the ‘troubles’, but the first section, entitled Partyin’, contains an extremely understated reference to the process of lesbian mutual identification. The video contains a series of short clips, filmed by Byrne in her taxi, showing drunken people on their return home from nights out, and presented by choppy editing described by Byrne as ‘like a machine gun.’

Picking up two young people from outside The Kremlin, a gay bar in Belfast, 511

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Byrne asks them about their night out. The adolescent boy responds by explaining his night in a flamboyant and camp manner, while the girl sits quietly, listening. To get the girl to speak, Byrne asks her if the boy is her boyfriend, and she responds in a shocked tone that they are just friends. Looking at her via the rear view mirror, Byrne then asks the girl if she has a boyfriend – the girl stares at her in disbelief and shouts, “No!” Byrne smiles, and the eye contact between the two women is paused to a still frame. Rather than vocally declare their lesbianism, both women need only to look at each other to confirm it.

Fig. 43. Lisa Byrne, Taxi Trilogy, 2009. Three-part single channel video, 19:43 mins, video still.

There is a subtlety in the video that promotes ambiguity. In the cinema there is a delight in the delicate inference of lesbianism, as Weiss notes, the pleasure lies in the ‘discovery of subtextual lesbian scenes,’ and Byrne’s smirk epitomises this frisson. It creates a space of possibility that becomes quite monstrously challenging to heterosexuality. As Judith Butler notes:

That heterosexuality is always in the act of elaborating itself is evidence that it is perpetually at risk, that is, that it ‘knows’ its own possibility of coming undone: hence its compulsion to repeat which is at once a foreclosure of that which threatens its coherence. That it can never eradicate that risk attests to its profound dependency on the homosexuality that it seeks fully to eradicate and never can or

512 Weiss, Vampires and Violets, op. cit., p. 84.
that it seeks to make second, but which is always already there as a prior possibility.\textsuperscript{513}

Rather than overtly declaring lesbianism like the work of earlier lesbian artists like Opie, in \textit{Partyin’} the binary between hetero- and homo- sexuality is powerfully challenged in Byrne’s liminal suggestion of alternative sexuality. As I mentioned above with regard to \textit{The Hunger}, the horror film exemplifies the issue of confirming heterosexuality, as the lesbian is always killed off, even if the vampire isn’t. Yet, in \textit{The Hunger} Sarah never renounced Miriam’s sexual seduction, only her thirst for blood, as Barbara Creed writes, ‘she happily joins her female seducer, [becoming] lost to the real world forever’\textsuperscript{514} – and her potential for lesbianism is always latently present. I will discuss the fascination in horror with the connections between abjection and lesbian representation later in this chapter, but what I wish to note here is that it is the instability and monstrous omnipresent potential of the concept of lesbian that makes it so fascinating. Byrne’s sly smile and knowing flick of the eye, in the revealing of her sexuality in \textit{Partyin’}, addresses the issue of the societal lack of imagery to describe the lesbian and at the same time shows that homosexuality is more threatening than heterosexuality would admit.

Moving on to another of Byrne’s pieces, the photographic triptych \textit{Simultaneous Perspectives} (2007), the image of the possible haunting lesbian is further accentuated and ‘decorporealised.’ Byrne’s artwork decidedly deals with the practice of representation, and simultaneously explores photography’s relationship to time, liminality, and death. Byrne believes that the characters she depicts in her photographs are ‘between presence and absence through the photographic record. Life brings death, light brings darkness and memory brings loss. Time moves between and beyond.’\textsuperscript{515} In \textit{Simultaneous Perspectives}, Byrne creates the images by colour pinhole cameras, generally set up for 15 minutes, subsequently causing a sense of movement and action in the still photographs. This triptych shows the photographic result of three cameras shooting simultaneously, from different angles of the same event. The images are dark, blurred and haunting, they show a considerable depth via the

\textsuperscript{514} Creed, \textit{The Monstrous-Feminine}, op. cit., p. 61.
imbrication of images, layered by the process of pinhole photography. Byrne writes about the piece that ‘in a photographic framework the object in movement, over a long exposure, creates a blur. The blurry photograph causes a failure in the copy because it no longer resembles the object.’ The blurred figure in the triptych is in fact two separate female bodies, entwined in a sexual act, but the blurring creates a sense of a fluid and singular, morphed creature with numerous heads, breasts, and limbs, whereby the physical, corporeal presence of the body is negated. The imagery of the hazy and obscured figures recalls photographs from the nascent birth of photography, images of ‘ghosts’ or souls that have been captured on daguerreotypes. The imagery of this monstrous multi-limbed creature in the photographs evokes a sense of horror, but it is not entirely explicit. Rhona Berenstein notes that representations of homosexuality through ghostly images or horror are ‘a prime arena for depictions of sexualities and practices that fall outside the purview of patriarchal culture, [because] the subgeneric tropes of the unseen, the ghost and the haunted house, match the marginal position of homosexuality in dominant culture.’

![Fig. 44. Lisa Byrne, Simultaneous Perspectives, 2007. Three C-type prints on dibond, 114.3 x 88.9 cm.](image)

These three images of Byrne and her female partner in bed together evoke an ambiguity. Is there one person, two, more? In fact, in a recent exhibition of *Simultaneous Perspectives*, before being corrected, the curator

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presented the work as Byrne and her male lover. What does this say? This heteronormative assumption leads one to the answer that the image is not overly overt in its depiction of lesbian sex. However, the duplicative blurring of the entwined bodies alludes to the narcissistic element of same-sex relationships put forward by Freud. In 1914, Freud wrote that psychoanalysis has ‘discovered’:

especially clearly in people whose libidinal development has suffered some disturbance, such as perverts and homosexuals, that in their later choice of love-objects they have taken as a model not their mother but their own selves. They are plainly seeking themselves as a love-object, and are exhibiting a type of object-choice which must be termed ‘narcissistic’. In this observation we have the strongest of the reasons which have led us to adopt the hypothesis of narcissism.518

Byrne presents us with this association, the sensual unity of anatomical likeness, yet the naked bodies in Simultaneous Perspectives do not present a couple that are the mirror image of each other. Instead, through the blur that has undifferentiated one from another, she presents us with a single monstrous figure that evokes a prevailing and needed sense of completeness, however ghostlike and unearthly – it becomes like Miriam’s loneliness, her unattainable desire for a partner that can be like her and live forever. In the photographs, the images becomes extremely horrifying, the boundaries between the “I” and the “not-I” literally become blurred, and this loss of subjectivity becomes shudderingly abject, but exciting because of it.

The two females are indistinguishable, hidden, and removed from visual recognition; they are spectral remnants. Byrne writes that ‘absence and presence unfold and the subject in movement is situated between representation and non-representation’519 – female sexuality cannot be depicted because femininity is the negative in the phallocentric binary, thus lesbian sexuality cannot visually be defined at all. By representing these sexual bodies in this ambiguous and unnerving nature, Byrne invokes the still-frightening potential of the lesbian as formidable spectre – because as Whatling notes and will be discussed later, ‘the nostalgia for abjection works

519 Byrne, ‘Simultaneous Perspectives: Artist’s Statement,’ op. cit.
against the inevitable failure of lesbian [sexual representation]. Through subversive appropriations of the negative patriarchal representations of lesbianism, the monstrous images in Byrne’s series presents a liminal and abject potential for exploring the ambiguity of lesbian sexuality – a space between the visible and invisible.

Kathy High

Kathy High is an American artist, based in New York. Her practice deals with various topics, from science to anthropomorphism, and explores these issues through a focus on sexuality. She also runs many projects, including the Vampire Study Group, which is an art group exploring life, death, horror, and biotechnology. She is interested in the vampire for both its lesbian connotations, and its immortality. She believes that: ‘The vampiric acts of sucking and feeding are interpretations of the medical industry’s economic exchange, the exchange of body materials, and the parasitic ability to subsist on other living bodies.’ Contemplations of death are a very strong element of High’s practice and the first piece I wish to discuss is Everyday Problems of the Living. This single channel video explores the year 2000 in relation to her death, not merely because of the Millennium bug, but because from childhood High believed that she would die in that year. Her fears become increased as she creates a two-minute video for each month of the year. Being highly superstitious, High did not release the video until 2005, just in case she died in the meantime! Throughout the video, High calls psychics and asks if they think she’s going to die, and she films various images of herself and her animals interacting. The section Death Poses is one of the most powerful; as the name would imply, High is seen in various poses around her apartment pretending to be dead. These images in some sense reference horror because they use traditional domestic horror spaces – the bathroom, the stairs, the bedroom – perhaps she could have accidentally fallen, or had a seizure or heart attack, but foul play is never ruled out. There is a subtle implication that it is a failure of the medical system to ensure her safety.

520 Clare Whatling, Screen Dreams: Fantasising Lesbians in Film, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1997, p. 111.
supernatural or unnatural death, but it never becomes explicit – the frightening imagery of the ‘corpse’ is enough to cause horror. As Kristeva notes:

...the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. ...The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us.\textsuperscript{522}

Fig. 45. Kathy High, *Everyday Problems of the Living* (Death Poses), 2000-5. Single channel video, 28:11 mins, video still.

In the small bathroom High lies naked in the bath, peaceful looking, but the image becomes gruesome when we realise the radio beside her has fallen into the water and had provided a most horrendously electrifying ‘death.’ As the audience watches her in the bath, her hand moves, reanimating her supposed dead body. Yet, this hand, the only moving image in the scene, positions her even more ‘dead’ as it is revealed that it is just her (pseudo-rigor-mortised) body being pulled by gravity from the forced posture created when she ‘died.’ The almost frozen image intentionally references the scene in the bathroom in *Psycho* when Marion Crane is revealed to be dead – when we

\textsuperscript{522} Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, op. cit., p. 3-4.
view her completely static eye that looks like a film still, the surrounding dripping water reveals that it is only she who is motionless. Mulvey sees Marion’s inanimate stare becoming uncanny, and the drip of water reanimates the image to contrast with the corpse and accentuate this uncanny feeling. In this image, Mulvey believes that the ‘stillness of the “corpse”’ is a reminder that the cinema’s living moving bodies are simply animated stills and the homology between stillness and death returns to haunt the moving image.\footnote{Mulvey, Death 24 x a Second, op. cit., p. 88.} As I mentioned in Chapter Three, the subversion of linear narrative is a very persuasive method of denying patriarchy, but while High’s video invokes this concept, her image of the lesbian body is just as subversive. By positioning herself in these scenarios – lying in the hall with her cat walking over her body to pass, or spread-eagle on her bed with the cat chewing her fingers – High situates the lesbian (the ‘lonely-spinster-with-cat’ trope) as invisible to society.

Who is going to find her dead body? The soundtrack of Death Poses accentuates this – the buzzing of a fly. This sound connotes a reference to Emily Dickinson, the supposed lesbian recluse, who wrote poem 591, I heard a Fly buzz – when I died. Rather than being a triumphant or emotional death and

\begin{figure}[h]
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\caption{Kathy High, Everyday Problems of the Living (Death Poses), 2000-5. Single channel video, 28:11 mins, video still.}
\end{figure}
continuation of a transcendent soul, the fly for both High and Dickinson represents the decay and abject dissolution of the physical body. The suggestion to Dickinson’s poem, and subsequently her tormented life, explores the difficulty of the lesbian experience, a fight to be accepted in the community, but the results become ultimately futile and dying alone, the return to dissolution, is inevitable. Dickinson finishes her poem with ‘and then I could not see to see –’ and perhaps could not be seen, but she could speak. This speaking from beyond the grave decorporealises the lesbian body but provides a strange power over the symbolic – like Byrne’s bodies, the voice becomes a liminal space between presence and absence. With this allusion to Dickinson, alongside the pseudo-death imagery, High’s video creates the haunting quality of the apparitional lesbian; the corporeality of the body cannot transcend anything, but the abject liminal quality of invisibility can.

The fact that High is so interested in the invisible power of the apparitional lesbian’s sexuality can be seen more directly in her next video, The Icky and Kathy Trilogy (1999). Focused on lesbianism and, like Byrne, the lack of available images to represent lesbian sexuality, the video is divided into three parts; Icky and Kathy Find Liberty, The Babysitter, and Learning to Suck. Each section documents the lives of apparently incestuous twin sisters, who prefer to ‘play’ with each other than with other people.

![Fig. 47. Kathy High, The Icky and Kathy Trilogy, (The Babysitter), 1999. Single channel video, 9:23 mins, two video stills.](image-url)

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Icky and Kathy Find Liberty opens with images of the Statue of Liberty in NY, and the shaky camera seems to be fought over by the twins, with their voiceovers talking about the ‘sexy’ statue. The image cuts to the bedroom, and the two girls in skimpy underwear discuss how sexually enjoyable it was to see the large figure of the statue, while the camera focuses solely on shot-reverse-shots of their crotches. Becoming aroused by their discussion, they begin mutual masturbation while saying that they ‘shouldn’t be doing this’ but simultaneously becoming excited because they say they ‘know what to expect.’ Their underwear falls to the floor and the images of their bodies become slowed down, blurred and out of focus, similar to Byrne’s Simultaneous Perspectives. The image cuts to the second title, The Babysitter. The subtitle in parenthesis is ‘(based on an actual event).’ The babysitter, wearing a blonde rubber wig, enters the room (played by High), smiling and asking a young ‘child’ (also played by High) how her day was. The camera angle points upwards to the babysitter and downwards towards the ‘child’ so that a sense of height difference is suggested. The child responds by saying that she learned about babies in school. The babysitter suggests that they could ‘play mommies and babies’ and reveals her (plastic) breast, enticing the girl to suck it. Excited but frightened, the girl edges towards the breast but she refuses at the last minute, and the slightly frustrated but polite babysitter covers her breast and says that they could play different games if she prefers. The scene cuts to the final sequence, Learning to Suck, whereby the voices of the twins, again just showing their crotches, discuss why she didn’t suck the babysitter’s breast.

![Fig. 48. Kathy High, The Icky and Kathy Trilogy (Learning to Suck), 1999. Single channel video, 9:23 mins, two video stills.](image)
One of the twins tells the other that she should have sucked, and describes, using drawings of breasts with arrows pointing to the nipple, how they used to suck their mother's breasts. They practice sucking on a teddy-bear with plastic breasts attached. The final image of the video reveals one of the twins masturbating in the shower, involved in a full conversation with the other twin who doesn’t respond – by implication it is revealed that Icky is not her twin, but the other half of Kathy – her hidden, sexual and desiring half.

The video explores different layers of sexuality and desire, combining the maternal and the narcissistic. As mentioned with regards to Lisa Byrne’s practice, the image of the blurred bodies and the twinning suggests a Freudian homosexual narcissism, but the constant reference to the maternal – the Statue of Liberty, the babysitter, and the teddy-bear – all ironically connect lesbian sexuality to the space and desire of the mother. This incestuous maternal desire is a common trope of lesbian sexuality theory, but rather than providing active sexual subjects in lesbianism, maternal connotations merely suggest identification and passivity. Adrienne Rich, who wrote *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*, believes that lesbianism is a continuum, a connection between women that is beyond patriarchy – and linked by the maternal. Rich writes:

> If we consider the possibility that all women – from the infant suckling her mother's breast, to the grown woman experiencing orgasmic sensations while suckling her own child, perhaps recalling her mother's milk-smell in her own; to two women, like Virginia Woolf’s Chloe and Olivia, who share a laboratory; to the woman dying at ninety, touched and handled by women – exist on a lesbian continuum.\(^{525}\)

Yet, this identification with the maternal and all other women negates female sexuality as libidinal and active, and returns, unintentionally, back to the site of feminine as lack. Or as Elisabeth Grosz notes, in psychoanalysis, ‘woman is man minus the phallus, and its benefits; she lacks the capacity to initiate, to activate.’\(^{526}\) How does the image of ‘two lacks’ become visual? In lesbian representation, that is the problem, it doesn’t; in patriarchy the female lacks the visual signifier of desire – the phallus. Thus through discussions of the lesbian via psychoanalysis, even female theorists like Kristeva cannot see the lesbian, and

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she becomes denigrated and dissolved into a non-visual psychotic experience. Kristeva writes:

Lesbian loves comprise the delightful arena of a neutralized, filtered libido, devoid of the erotic cutting edge of masculine sexuality. Light touches, caresses, barely distinct images fading one into the other, growing dim or veiled without bright flashes into the mellowness of a dissolution, a liquefaction, a merger. ...Or the light rumble of soft skins that are iridescent not from desire but from that opening-closing, blossoming-wilting, an in-between hardly established that sudden collapses in the same warmth, that slumbers or wakens within the embrace of the baby and its nourishing mother. ...as a consequence [it becomes] death: lost identity, lethal dissolution of psychosis, anguish on account of lost boundaries, suicidal call of the deep.527

By positioning lesbian sexuality as a return to the maternal, she becomes lost, melancholic and invisible. Yet, perhaps not like the violence of abjection, the lesbian still becomes a monstrous liminal character for Kristeva, and the invisibility could be seen as a powerful concept in terms of Castle’s proposition, but the issue of active sexuality still remains – through her Freudian and Lacanian reasoning, Kristeva cannot conceive the fact that lesbianism can be sexually desirous. In fact, in terms of psychoanalysis, to quote de Lauretis, all women ‘cannot desire’ because they have ‘no phallic capital to invest in.’528 Teresa de Lauretis contests Kristeva’s maternal focus and proposes a new model of lesbian desire; opposing Freud and Lacan’s idea that the female cannot desire or subsequently be a fetishist, she believes that the lesbian desires the body of the woman. The mother’s body is the lost object of desire for both males and females, but simultaneously the female body itself is also a lost desire for the lesbian (and also the heterosexual woman) – because the female body is already patriarchally inscribed as lack. Thus through a form of fantasmatic ‘desire to desire,’ de Lauretis suggests that desire itself, through the imbrication of the female body and the maternal, can be achieved by a fetish, which does not have the phallus as the fetish object, but the entire female body. As de Lauretis notes:

In my view, then, lesbian desire is not the identification with another woman’s desire, but the desire for her desire as signified in her fetish and the fantasy scenario it evokes. What one desires is her lover’s

528 ibid., p. 217.
perverse desire; her fetish, in which her castration or lack of being is both acknowledged and denied, also mediates the other’s fantasmatic access to her originally lost body. Provided their fantasy scenarios are compatible, both subjects can find together, always for the first time, that fantasmatic body for themselves and in each other.529

The access to this maternal/narcissistic/fetishistic feminine body is precarious, as ‘every moment of bodily reconstruction is accompanied by destruction,’530 yet it is this ‘necessary repetition of loss and dispossession’ that actually sustains the lesbian’s ‘subjectivity and desire.’531

It is this wavering between presence and absence that is ‘revealed’ in The Icky and Kathy Trilogy, this desire to desire inherent in the lesbian that provides the connection between the maternal and the female body. Through the simulated sex, the subtitle ‘(based on an actual event),’ and the fake breasts, ideas of reality, memory, and fantasy converge into liminality and desire. Using fuzzy super-8 footage converted to video, the images of narcissistic and maternal desire are subtly disclosed, hinted at, and the same time lost, particularly in the final scene. When it is revealed in the ultimate shower scene – the liminal site of cleansing and disgust (which I will discuss further in Interim Four) – that Icky is an imaginary fantasy, the attempted possession of the lesbian image has vanished, but the lesbian’s latent desire remains.

Breda Lynch

Desire is similarly explored in Breda Lynch’s work. Her practice deals with representations of gender identity explored through Gothic and horror-based imagery; through these tropes she investigates issues of ‘unrequited, forbidden, or doomed love.’532 The issue of twinning, which links to High’s video and to Strieber’s novel, is also familiar imagery for Lynch because she is a twin and has made several artworks on this theme. An Irish artist based in Limerick, Lynch’s media include printmaking, drawing, photography, and more recently, video. Through the latter medium, Lynch recently created a single channel video

529 ibid., p. 251.
530 ibid., p. 252.
531 ibid., p. 253.
installation entitled *The Kiss* (2010). The video presents slowed-down sequences appropriated from very different sources, and is generally installed in a small screen positioned on the ground, leaning at an angle to the corner of a room. The first sequence in the video is taken from a full-length film entitled *Mädchen in Uniform* (Leontine Sagan, 1931). Based on a relationship between a schoolmistress Fraulein Von Bernberg and one of her pupils, Manuela, the young girl is infatuated with the teacher and the plot revolves around this provocative premise. The film is one of the first ever narratives in early cinema to represent lesbianism, however subtle, and it has been hailed as a cult lesbian film. The kiss between the teacher and her adoring student is a very important scene, whereby the teacher reciprocates the girl’s feelings by kissing her on the lips as opposed to the kisses on the forehead she gives to the other students. As I have mentioned in other chapters, the adolescent girl in Gothic and horror stories evokes a sense of ‘awakening sexuality.’ Lynch appropriates this kiss; by showing the sequence in slow motion, she sensually presents the climactic moment of transgression, before quickly moving on to completely different images.

![Fig. 49. Breda Lynch, The Kiss, 2010. Single channel video, 4:05 mins (looped), two video stills.](image)

The second clip is captured from the first scene of Siouxsie and the Banshees’s music video ‘Spellbound’ from 1981. The background of the clip depicts Siouxsie Sioux crawling across the screen in a feline position, while the foreground presents a solarized sequence of a black cat coming towards the audience. In the video the two images (cat/Siouxsie) are layered; black becomes invisible, whereby both cat and woman blend into each other.
Siouxsie Sioux is a powerful figure in popular culture, her transgressive and Goth(ic) fashion aesthetic was very influential in the 80s, and while parents were shocked and afraid of her, devoted teenagers would freely show their adulation and desire, which correlates to the character of Fraulein Von Bernberg in Mädchen in Uniform. Like Sioux, the cat as an animal is both revered and feared. Ancient Egypt believed cats to be sacred, while many Western cultures believe that they bring bad luck, particularly black cats that cross your path, as mythical witches are well known to keep these little felines. Thus the imagery of the cat in Lynch’s work presents a set of fascinating contradictions – but the anthropomorphic representation clearly evokes femininity, even the term puss or pussycat etymologically stems from the Swedish ‘kattepuss’ or the Norwegian ‘pusekatt’ which firstly denotes a woman and, by extension, a female cat.\textsuperscript{533} As mentioned before, Kristeva talks about the abject confronting us with ‘those fragile states where man strays on the territories of animal.’\textsuperscript{534} This personified cat concatenates ‘animal’ and ‘woman’ and becomes a space of repugnant rupture.

\textbf{Fig. 50.} Breda Lynch, \textit{The Kiss}, 2010. Single channel video, 4:05 mins (looped), video still.

At different stages throughout the video, Lynch uses a very short, almost frozen, image of the smiling student Manuela from Mädchen in Uniform (Fig. 50).

\textsuperscript{533} Paraphrased from Webster’s Encyclopaedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language, Gramercy Books, New York, 1996, p. 1571.
The face of the young girl engenders the point of view shot whereby the audience appears to be positioned in the role of the teacher just before she kisses Manuela. This camera angle is a very powerful one in the relationship with the gaze in cinema, and more importantly here, to queer representation. The theorist Patricia White writes that the POV shot ‘align(s) the spectator (…) with something – for effect and affect.’ White believes that this view that ‘play[s] on representational adequacy, on the border, on the anxious reversal of subject and object positions, on the drama of emergence into the field of vision, has specific resonance for a theory of homosexual representation at the margins.’

Like Deborah Bright’s *Dream Girls*, through the uses of the POV shot there is space for the lesbian audience to enter into the imagery – but in a very different way. What is striking about Lynch’s video is this ‘reversal of subject and object.’ Here the audience’s position is both invisible and very present, another allusion to Castle’s apparitional lesbian.

As I mentioned in regards to Byrne’s work, there is a pleasure in the understated suggestion of lesbianism in film – the ‘discovery of subtextual lesbian scenes.’ Clare Whatling notes that the hidden lesbian in horror provides a ‘thrill of the forbidden, the nostalgic sense of lesbianism as taboo, its images, rendered covertly, for our eyes only.’ Echoing Terry Castle, Whatling believes that the lesbian viewer enjoys the ‘erotics of the lesbian taboo’, it is a desire for abjection that ‘depends upon the veiled sign, the covert and inhibited desire, to convey its interests’ because the lesbian had been treated that way in history. Simultaneously, the lesbian has a lot of denial to deal with; if heterosexuality relies on homosexuality for its otherness, as discussed above via Butler, then homosexuality relies on heterosexuality too.

The pleasure in viewing heteronormative film is the ability to work within the narrative, to fill in the gaps, and change the emphasis from straight to lesbian, echoing the process of the lesbian’s removal from the symbolic order. But what about the monstrous image of lesbianism? Suggesting Kristeva’s abject melancholic woman discussed in Chapter Three, Whatling believes that the lesbian refuses the of loss of heterosexuality, and becomes melancholic. She writes:

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536 Weiss, *Vampires and Violets*, op. cit., p. 84.
537 Whatling, *Screen Dreams*, op. cit., p. 89.
538 ibid., p. 82.
The lesbian body is thus... configured on the site of the pain engendered by the loss of one’s position in the symbolic order, as loss which engenders a melancholia which, at the same time, makes visible and real one’s lesbian identity. The abject desire for the lost heterosexual is thus, ironically, necessary to the articulation of the lesbian identity.

The lesbian viewer then, according to Whatling, has to create a form of repetition compulsion, a desire to experience the heterosexual scene, while at the same time, wishing for the (horror) lesbian allusion in film to fulfil a sense of nostalgia.

Through a powerful negation of filmic narrative, Lynch’s The Kiss deals with a possession of the found footage and manipulation of the imagery so that the looping narrative becomes an exploration of Lynch’s nostalgic desires to explore the monstrous images of the lesbian in film. The audience in the video installation are constantly bombarded with haunting sounds, and slow motion sequences of different clips whereby a sense of rigid conclusion is never attained, it is ‘the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite’ of Kristeva’s abject that never allows a sense of completeness. These images will always be haunted with a melancholic edge; Whatling believes that ‘positive’ images of lesbianism will never be able to fulfil the desires of the lesbian audiences because the previous lack of positive imagery creates such an expectation – what is appropriated instead is a nostalgia for abjection, a liminal state between positive and negative imagery which will cause a fascinating shudder between desire and repulsion.

In a similar, but possibly stronger piece, Lynch’s other video also explores the issue of horror in lesbian representation. Entitled After Rebecca, I curated this video into my Dark Waters exhibition discussed in Interim Three. In the piece, Lynch appropriates two sequences from Alfred Hitchcock’s seminal film Rebecca (1940). Lynch took the short scenes and manipulated them by making them silent, and slowing the sequences down. The left hand video presents the scene in which the film’s audience, and in fact, the unnamed protagonist (or as she is known, the second Mrs. de Winter), is about to view Mr. de Winter’s mansion Manderley for the first time. The second, right-hand, image depicts the second Mrs. de Winter reaching her hand out towards a door, the entrance to the first Mrs. de Winter’s (Rebecca’s) bedroom. Just as she (and the audience) is about to enter the room, and similarly, in the left-hand sequence...
as the audience is about to enter the door of the grand Manderley, Lynch reverses both sequences, and returns to the beginning of the scenes, which infuriatingly halts the longed-for narrative.

Hitchcock’s film *Rebecca* was based on Daphne Du Maurier’s 1938 novel of the same name. The story revolves around a dead woman’s affective power over her husband, and his new wife. But it is not the physical presence of Rebecca that is haunting the new family unit; it is the lingering memory of her and subsequent inadequacies that the new wife is led to feel — the new Mrs. de Winter is haunted by the thoughts that her new husband is still in love with his dead wife. Mrs. Danvers, the housekeeper, who is presented as Rebecca’s closest friend and confidante, intimidates and further confuses the new Mrs. de Winter, leading her to doubt Mr. de Winter’s affection for her and to ultimately contemplate suicide. However, before she does so, the true feelings of Mr. de Winter’s relationship to Rebecca is revealed, that their supposed relationship was a farce, he never loved her and they were just ‘keeping up appearances’.

While not specifically a horror film, Patricia White discusses Hitchcock’s *Rebecca* as ‘unleash(ing) an excess of female sexuality that cannot be contained without recourse to the supernatural, or indeed the unnatural.’ In her book, *Uninvited*, White develops Terry Castle’s literary theories of the apparitional lesbian and applies them to lesbian representation in film. Obviously, as White points out, due to the Hollywood Production Code Administration, the film *Rebecca* never explicitly denotes lesbianism or presents

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539 White, *unInvited*, op. cit., p. 61.
an overt lesbian protagonist, but the spectral ‘presence’ of the character Rebecca alludes to a monstrous female sexuality, suggested by Max de Winter’s reference to ‘the “unspeakable” nature of Rebecca’s confession’ on the night she died. Simultaneously, other lesbian indications include the second Mrs. de Winter’s desire to emulate Rebecca, and Mrs. Danvers’s obsessional loyalty to her dead mistress. All these imbrications in the film subversively imply and invoke apparitional lesbian figures.

In the video After Rebecca, Lynch appropriates two of the most powerful scenes in the film; by showing the sequences in slow motion, she sensually presents the moments in which the new Mrs. de Winter powerfully desires to see something – which links to the desire for representation in early lesbian art practices. Firstly, the girl wishes to view Manderley, and then she yearns to enter Rebecca’s room. The audience becomes entwined in the unnamed protagonist’s need, we want to enter the house, we want to see Rebecca’s bedroom, yet we cannot. The image of the hand in the right channel summons the audience to become involved in the action, yet there is no character present in either video with which to align our desires. This disembodied hand engenders the queer point of view shot that I discussed in regards to The Kiss. It is as if the hand that reaches out and tries to touch the door-handle belongs to the audience, and what are we trying to find? In the film, the camera angles and mise-en-scene creates an eerie resonance so that the house itself becomes a personified metaphor for Rebecca’s body. Thus, we are trying and, through Lynch’s reversal of the sequence, failing to capture the apparitional lesbian.

As I discussed in relation to video installation in Chapter Three, the divergent two-channel video in After Rebecca attempts to destabilize the concept of the cinematic experience by its jarring double screen, creating confusion, displacement, and a fracture in the field of vision. The audience cannot view both images at the same time, and cannot be completely engaged as they are at a single channel viewing experience, this uncertainty and doubling evokes the uncanny nature of this piece. I believe that this breakdown of the narrative in these two sequences is the key to Lynch’s subversion of the original film. Lynch’s looping representation of invisible desire can also be seen in Byrne’s and High’s work, an uncanny layering of vision and invisibility. By the use of the two screens together, the video piece is imbricated

\[^{540}\text{ibid., p. 66.}\]
representations of non-person, in a non-place, through a space of abject rupture – a true representation of lesbian desire, as this desire can never be completely revealed. White states that ‘...the fact that [the character] Rebecca is not even en-visioned may signify more than homophobic negation. Through its inscription in narrative, perverse desire itself, rather than its object, is made representable.’\textsuperscript{541} The position of desire becomes accentuated in the double channel video, and visible in the space in between the two images, it is the desire to desire that is recreated, and generates liminality between presence and dispossession. After Rebecca shows the ultimate return to the apparitional lesbian figure – the dichotomy of being unrepresentable, but entirely present and terrifying at the same time.

\textbf{My Practice}

To conclude this chapter on lesbian representation, I want to talk about two of my video pieces. In a sense, the earlier video piece, which I completed in 2008 and is entitled \textit{Facticium}, has similar elements to both Breda Lynch’s videos and Lisa Byrne’s photographs. \textit{Facticium} is a site-specific video installation, filmed and presented in a particular room in a gallery.

\textbf{Fig. 52.} Jenny Keane, \textit{Facticium}, 2007.  
Single channel video installation, 4:52 mins (looped), two video stills.

Although the filmed space is still in the gallery setting, I chose this particular area in the gallery as the whiteness reveals a long, dark corridor, and iron clad

\textsuperscript{541} White, \textit{uninvited}, op. cit., p. 67 (emphasis added).
barred and boarded windows, which impose a sense of both incarceration and impenetrability – a feeling of not being able to escape. The video presents a room, where I am standing and constantly attempting to evade the view of the camera, which is relentlessly spinning around and sporadically surveying the space. I felt that the camera was chasing me around the room, searching for my presence, almost like a surveillance camera. This prying interrogative sense led me to explore, like my analysis of Lynch’s and High’s practices, questions surrounding the desire for the figure. The audience craves an uninterrupted view of the figure and desire to experience a sense of visual pleasure. The video is an attempt to negate this sense of possession by the spectator, via the camera’s swinging and sporadic actions which never allows the image of the woman to be ‘captured’, truly experienced or explored.

Fig. 53. Jenny Keane, Facticium, 2007. Single channel video installation, two installation shots.

While the video deals with counteracting this sense of visual pleasure, I also wanted to capture a sense of threat. The power of the figure is not just its ability to escape from the eyes of the spectator, but its inconsistent idiosyncratic movements leaves the audience with a sense of powerlessness and vulnerability. Sometimes the figure appears from the left, sometimes the right, sometimes upside-down and even more strangely, not at all, and these random movements reference depictions of monstrous characters in horror films. There is a sense of anticipation, shock, and unpredictability that recalls the techniques used in horror to disorientate the audience, and the video utilises slow motion, speeding up the footage, and occasional leisurely intervals that focus solely on the wall of the room.
Similar to Breda Lynch’s After Rebecca, Facticium presents the looping narrative of unrequited desire which posits the spectator in a sense of frustration and longing for the image, a desire for the body that cannot be captured. Likewise, as in Lisa Byrne’s photographs and High’s Trilogy, the blurring and confusion about the existence of the figure, denotes potential for a loss of the physical, corporeal presence of the body - a loss of substance to the lesbian body, which artists of the 80s, like Catherine Opie, have struggled against. Yet, as Terry Castle notes, ‘(t)he case could be made that the metaphor [of the apparitional lesbian] meant to derealize lesbian desire in fact did just the opposite. For embedded in the ghostly figure ... was inevitably a notion of reembodiment: of uncanny return to the flesh.’\textsuperscript{542} So while Facticium references the negative haunted effect of the lesbian in literature and films, its installation within the gallery in which the audience can envision the presence of the figure outside the video itself, evokes, or even, invokes the presence of the spectral lesbian. She is there, in the room with you as you watch the video, and you can sense her presence all around you.

Moving on to another work, Bitter Sea (After The Hunger) is a recent video installation from 2011, and like my series The Lick Drawings (discussed in Interim Two) and Lynch’s videos, it is an appropriation from a horror film. Quite aptly for this chapter, the video shows a sequence taken from The Hunger, and depicts the scene after Sarah’s attempted suicide, where John pushes Miriam down the stairs and she starts to crumble into dust.

![Fig. 54. Jenny Keane, Bitter Sea (After The Hunger), 2011. Triple channel video installation, 1:28 mins (looped), two video stills.](image)

Captured directly from the film but manipulated, the video recreates the film’s previously fragmented shot-reverse-shot sequence (which discloses Miriam’s dissolution simultaneously with those of her attic-incarcerated

\textsuperscript{542} Castle, The Apparitional Lesbian, op. cit., p. 63.
companions) into a single shot of Miriam alone, and the image is reverse-looped so that the Miriam’s body continuously dissolves and becomes embodied again – infinitely. The installation is set up so that there are three TV monitors positioned in a triangle, the screens face upwards (to mirror Miriam’s fall so that the audience looks down on her) and each screen repeats the same video at different times.

This reappropriation and manipulation of film clips, like Lynch’s videos, recalls Laura Mulvey’s concept of the ‘possessive spectator,’ as I discussed in Interim Two. Extricating the paused or looped image from films, she notes that: ‘The “fetishistic spectator” becomes more fascinated by image than plot, returning compulsively to privileged moments, investing emotion and “visual pleasure” in any slight gesture, a particular look or exchange taking place on the screen.’\(^5\) She believes that this action of narrative subversion creates a ghostly and haunting ‘trace of reality.’ It becomes a fetishistic wound, and this way of looking ‘emasculates’ narrative structure, so that it becomes a metaphor for a ‘fragmented, even feminized, aesthetic of cinema.’\(^6\) If as Weiss believes, the vampire plot focuses on a bisexual triangle, the film should revolve around the man (good), the lesbian vampire (evil), and the unsuspecting female victim, who is sweet and innocent, and ‘merely a receptacle to assume the values’\(^7\) of the other two. The outcome should entail the man destroying the lesbian vampire, and denouncing her sexual potency. The Hunger does have a similar triangle, as when Miriam is at her weakest in the film, John pushes her down the stairs, completing the death that Sarah begins. In Bitter Sea however, the triangle installation presents the lesbian vampire in all three monitors creating a sense of imbrication and subverting the linear narrative of the film, suggesting Mulvey’s feminine, fragmented and liminal narrative. Similarly, the looping focus on the destruction of Miriam suggests de Lauretis’ ‘loss and dispossession’ of lesbian bodily reconstructions, again tracing reality and fantasy through the fetish of the female body as a way to reclaim desire for the lesbian. Thus the ghostly and looping imagery of Miriam’s lesbian body captured in Bitter Sea (alluding the triangle of self, other, and m/other, as well as the tripartite constructions of psychoanalysis) endeavours to explore the presences and absences of lesbian desire.

\(^5\) Mulvey, Death 24x a Second, op. cit., p. 165-166.
\(^7\) Weiss, Vampires and Violets, op. cit., p. 92.
Instead of death, Miriam’s squirming body on the floor strangely alludes to a sense of blurred orgasmic pleasure, whereby her lover could be out of shot, possibly performing oral sex, and while the blood surrounding Miriam’s mouth comes from a vampiric act, it also suggests a sexual act – as Creed notes, the lesbian vampire is transgressive because of menstrual blood, and this blood pouring from Miriam’s mouth intimates the residue of menstrual blood from cunnilingus. These images connect the sex/death dichotomy, and reanimate it into the Freudian death drive, as mentioned in Chapter Three – the video arouses an allusion to the French term for orgasm, *la petit mort*. The focus on the bloody and gaping mouth recalls the grotesque liminal body, and also the overt sexuality of the lesbian vampire herself. Christopher Craft notes about the vampire’s mouth:

As the primary site of erotic experience ... this mouth equivocates, giving the lie to the easy separation of the masculine and the feminine. Luring at first with an inviting orifice, a promise of red softness, but delivering instead a piercing bone, the vampire mouth fuses and confuses ... the gender based categories of the penetrating and the receptive. With its soft flesh barred by hard
bone, its red crossed by white, this mouth compels opposites and contrasts into a frightening unity.\textsuperscript{546}

This liminal space evokes a strong element of anxiety about the \textit{Vagina Dentata}, and simultaneously, as Andrea Weiss notes, it denotes the early twentieth century fears of lesbian penetration by the clitoris, whereby medical ‘experts’ imposed a ‘heterosexual model of sexual behaviour onto lesbian desire.’\textsuperscript{547} But the mouth itself indicates a fascinating imbrication of references so that this orifice becomes ultimately abject and liminal, and the final moment in \textit{Bitter Sea} creates a reference to the engulfing archaic mother. Creed notes that Miriam represents the figure of the ‘archaic mother in two forms – as a beautiful, ageless woman and as an ancient, crumbling figure.’\textsuperscript{548} In fact this crumbling form is so frighteningly similar to the ageing and abject image of Mrs. Bates in \textit{Psycho} that I would assume Tony Scott made a direct appropriation. Whereas we never see Mrs. Bates in all her lifelike glory, the sequence I captured from \textit{The Hunger} reanimates her, and transforms her into the monstrous, maternal and narcissistic lesbian of horror. Just before the scene loops, Miriam’s dissolving mouth, this gaping cavernous orifice that is in extreme excess, moves towards the camera and attempts to almost break free of the monitor – but the sequence is then reversed. I didn’t want Miriam’s transgressive lesbianism to cease, rather, I erased the ending of the film allowing Miriam to live forever in the video installation, constantly fluctuating between there and not-there, because, to quote Terry Castle: ‘For even at her most ethereal and dissembling, [the apparitional lesbian] cannot help but also signal – as if by secret benediction – the fall into flesh which is to come.’\textsuperscript{549}

The power in the spectral lesbian representation is actually in its invisibility – the potential to be there and not known. None of the above artists, myself included, allow our work to be pigeonholed into the title ‘lesbian art.’ We are all artists who just happen to be lesbians. The power of all the work presented here is the composition of liminality and ambiguity which, through a subversive appropriation of the apparitional lesbian figure, attempts to destabilize the structure of phallocentric and heteronormative binaries – but rather than

\textsuperscript{546} Cited in ibid., p. 91.
\textsuperscript{547} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{548} Creed, \textit{The Monstrous-Feminine}, op. cit., p. 72.
\textsuperscript{549} Castle, \textit{The Apparitional Lesbian}, op. cit., p. 65.
vocalise our difference in a clichéd documentation, the work discussed in this chapter permits ambiguity and presents allusions that may or may not be taken up by its audiences. Even if the work is not heralded as the ‘new form of lesbian representation’ because it is difficult to spot, the titillating nuances of lesbian sexuality provide an alternative form of experience – situated between binaries, it is what can be seen and not seen, the haunting site and sight of liminality. And so to conclude, I shall agree with Rhona Berenstein when she says: ‘For while I may desire representations of lesbians in all our visible glory, I never want to relinquish the bittersweet pleasures of the dyke disappearing act.’\textsuperscript{550}

\textsuperscript{550} Berenstein, ‘Adaptation, Censorship, and Audiences of Questionable Type,’ op. cit., p. 33.
The etymology of the word closet can be traced back to the French clos (enclosure), which stems from the Latin claudere (to shut), and clausium meaning ‘closed space.’ Michael Brown notes: ‘As a transitive verb, it means to isolate, hide or confine something. As an adjective, it suggests secrecy, covertness.’ Strangely incongruous to its contemporary queer ‘coming out’ connotations (being ‘in Narnia’ is a good example), the closet was originally a form of privacy for the higher social classes in the sixteenth-century. It was a secret, locked room in which the gentry had positioned to the side of the bedroom (which was then very much a public place), and was generally completely closed off to servants and guests, being one of the few rooms in the home that could be locked. At that time, the idea of privacy was a luxury reserved to people who could pay for it.

How this word came about to mean a person who does not admit their homosexuality is an enigma. Theories abound, but whether it came from the phrase ‘skeletons in your closet’ or derived from the term ‘water-closet’ is unknown but rather irrelevant, as both suggest a very hidden and intimate space. The newer use of the term closet, which is now integrated with the word cupboard, is more of a storage space and does not contain as much of the hidden and secretive allusions it once had. The original space, the ancient closet, implies escape and avoidance of reality, a contemplative space in which to be alone – and a room for activities that could not be shared with family members or servants.

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The concept of ‘coming out’ in relation to the closet can be seen in the relationship between public toilets and cottaging/cruising – this activity is seen as a very gay male pursuit that provoked a lot of media coverage in 1960s New York in some ways in relation to, and preceding, the Stonewall Riots. The ‘promiscuous’ men arrested in public toilets provided an opportunity to other gay men for their ‘dirty’ sexuality – to create a cultural panic through the use of a ‘dirty’ space. This mode of exclusion through dirtiness was further exacerbated by the threat of infection when the HIV and AIDS epidemic hit the media in the 1980s. Infection could be caught from blood, semen, vaginal fluid and breast milk, yet was seen to be most prevalent in homosexual men and intravenous drug users – the media propagated a fear of homosexuality, terming the virus as the ‘gay plague.’ As Harry Benshoff notes in Monsters in the Closet, the AIDS crisis accentuated the dread of homosexuality, and horror films reiterated this fear. Homosexuality becomes monstrous, as I discussed in Chapter Four because ‘the concepts of “monster” and “homosexual” share many of the same semantic charges and arouse many of the same fears about sex and death.’552 Due to HIV, the term coming-out itself thus brought with it these issues of seeping, abject, and life-threatening fluids that escape from the body – literalising abjection inside the queer subject.

In the home, the bathroom has become the most private of spaces – the locked door behind which many activities take place, and conflates with the traditional concept of the closet as site of hidden intimacy and escape. While baths are now positioned in relation to the toilet in most homes, in terms of the spatial metaphors in this thesis I have chosen to separate the object ‘toilet’ from the ‘bathroom’ as they suggest different connotations. The toilet itself deals with the expulsion of filth, which connects to the Abject art of the Nineties mentioned in Interim One, while the bath(room) explores a space of ritualistic cleansing, which, almost inexplicably, is represented in almost every horror film I have ever seen. What is it about the bathroom that creates such horror?

Films with frightening bathroom/shower scenes include: Psycho, The Shining, What Lies Beneath, Saw, Poltergeist, I Spit on your Grave, IT, Poltergeist, The Ring II, A Nightmare on Elm Street, Bodysnatchers, Repulsion, Shivers, Arachnophobia – to name but a few! This long-standing fascination

552 Harry M. Benshoff, Monsters in The Closet: Homosexuality and the Horror Film, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1997, p. 3.
with the use of bathrooms in horror films, connects to the concept of repetitive cleansing and purification, and becomes a rehashed image in many horror sequels. The bathroom is a dichotomous place, it is usually kept in pristine cleanliness, but it deals with the removal of abjected dirt. As Tony Magistrale notes: ‘The bathroom represents the most Gothic space in most homes; water pipes and sewage lines form a direct conduit to the underworld. Further, activities are preformed within the room’s space that is both idiosyncratic and not meant to be shared in public.’ Yet, Magistrale believes that Alfred Hitchcock ‘invented’ the fear of the bathroom in his film Psycho, and this space has become a trope of horror subsequently frightening audiences ever since:

At the moment when Marion’s relaxing shower is so abruptly interrupted, in an event that relies heavily upon Freud’s identification of the uncanny, Hitchcock signals to the world that a location formerly as private and unthreatening as a bathtub could no longer be trusted. The fact that horror is capable of invading such sites means that no one is safe anywhere.

I would tend to disagree with this point that the bathroom is a site of fear because of Hitchcock – the bathroom frightens for so many reasons and Hitchcock just tapped into its power. Fears would include the privacy issue mentioned by Magistrale, suggesting that it is a space to be alone and naked – but it can be trespassed (that is shown in the ‘Here’s Johnny’ scene in The Shining (Stanley Kubrick, 1980)). It also alludes to a space for possible masturbation (which links to films like Psycho and Carrie (Brian de Palma, 1976)) again implying being caught – in a personal, and ‘immoral’ act. There is also a fear of having to leave the room because of fire or other emergencies while being naked or in the process of defecating. Interestingly, the bathroom is the room in the house that is most likely to contain a mirror, referencing Lacan’s mirror stage. Perhaps this mirror is so frightening because, if the door is locked, there should not be anyone in the room except you and your reflection: what if you see something or someone in the mirror? This semi-opaque steamed up mirror provides a multitude of anxieties in vision. Similarly, Michael Warner notes that the bathroom is a very small, confined, and claustrophobic space and one that is ‘a site for the return of the repressed,’ filling the space with a sense of

554 ibid.
anxious tension – implied as a space for refuge, the bathroom subsequently becomes a trap. On another note, Sheila L. Cavanagh in her book *Queering Bathrooms (2010)* observes that there is ‘a metonymic association between clean toilets and sexual morality, dirty toilets and sexual immorality.’ Horror’s use of the bathroom embodies the cultural taboo of abject dirt and the taming of monstrous sexuality. Both public and the private bathrooms are fraught with issues, from gender binary difficulties to the abject and the sexually explicit, but each point places the site of the ‘smallest room’ as an environment of tension – one that the horror film so flippantly and yet captivatingly portrays.

My recent exhibition in March 2012 at *Platform Arts Gallery*, Belfast, entitled *Abluō*, explores these issues of cleansing, and purification – the word *Abluō* itself is Latin, meaning to wash away, and its English derivative ‘ablution’ has connotations of ritualistic and shamanic cleansing. Yet, *Abluō*’s most interesting figurative context means ‘I remove darkness,’ and this issue of darkness alludes to actions in the videos themselves as well as the nature of cleansing. As Gay Hawkins writes, ‘the concrete space [of the] bathroom is the private realm within the domestic where we are intimate with ourselves.’ He notes that the desire for cleanliness has become increasingly intense and has caused much anxiety, not because of ‘dodging germs,’ but of creating an ‘aesthetics of the self’ that culture demands:

> Making ourselves clean is ethical work; we are transforming the body in relation to a wider moral ethos. We are making a private self that is enmeshed with all the normative measures of privacy and purity swarming around the bathroom. In other words, most of us are far cleaner than we need to be, and most of us have an irrational fear of diseases and contamination. Our rituals of self-purification are linked more to ethical and visceral anxiety than to real biological danger.

So, the bathroom links to the ethical dilemmas we face, and this room becomes the space in which to release our anxieties, both metaphorically and physically. You may be able scrub dirt from the body, but can you scour filth from the mind? Kristeva discusses this, as I mentioned in Chapter Two, when she cites the Bible – the concept of physical abjection blends with emotional guilt in

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558 ibid., p. 58.
the Christian tradition and creates abjection in the psyche, not from part-
objects like faeces: ‘For evil, thus displaced into the subject, will not cease
 tormenting him from within, no longer as a polluting or defiling substance, but
 as the ineradicable repulsion of his henceforth divided and contradictory
being.’

Fig. 56. Jenny Keane, Abluō, 2012.
Double channel video installation, two installation shots.

This frightening division of the mind can be seen in Abluō. The exhibition
contains a video installation consisting of a double channel video installation
(see Figs. 56 and 57), and a single channel video installation (see Fig. 58). The
two-channel video explores issues of the uncanny double, the fragmented
nature of the mind, and also simultaneously examines the shot-reverse-shot
imagery of a filmic narrative. The left image consists of a hand leaning over the
dege of a bath, with black liquid slowly dripping from the fingers. It seems to be
static except for the noisy dripping liquid, but occasionally the hand moves –
not enough to be very obvious – but disconcertingly present at the same time,
suggesting life in death and death in life. The image of the languid hand
alludes to Jacques-Louis David’s eighteenth century painting, The Death of
Marat (1793), and the reference intimates this death in life. Is Marat dead or
dying in David’s painting? A similar connection to the story of Marat implies the
image of the hand might evoke ‘death at the hand of woman’ due to the fact
that Marat was murdered by Charlotte Corday – a ‘monstrous’ killer as
discussed in relation to female killers in Chapter Two. The hand in the video is
overtly feminine, with pale elongated fingers and beautifully manicured nails.
Taking this art-historical connotation into consideration, is the image in the
video one of suicide or monstrous murder? A traditional shot-reverse-shot

\footnote{Kristeva, Powers of Horror, op. cit., p. 116.}
sequence should uncover the answer, but the opposite video does not do so. Instead it reveals the black liquid dripping upon the tiles of a pristine white bathroom floor, slowly seeping into the white grout and making it ‘dirty.’ The video is looped and edited to create a fractured sense of time, whereby the liquid on the tiles constantly vary between a single drop to a fully black-soaked floor.

The bathroom is generally a bright, clean and sterilized environment that seems completely incongruous to the other rooms in a house, by its nature it should be the safest in the home, much safer than the frightening cellar that I discussed in Chapter One – but even here, the monstrous maternal is present. As Colette Balmain notes: ‘The use of water imagery can be interpreted as both a signifier of corruption and, at the same time, a reference to the sacred maternal.’ Balmain discusses that the references to dark water, particularly in Japanese horror, is an allusion to amniotic fluid and positions the maternal as a liminal state of the boundaries between good and evil, the dualistic abject mother that can give life and take it away. In the video the seeping black liquid escaping from the body represents this archaic mother, or rather denotes her presence in the body of the feminine – as Irigaray notes: ‘The mother always remains too familiar, and too close. In a way, the daughter has her mother under her skin, secreted in the deep, damp intimacy of the body, the mystery of her relationship to gestation, to birth, and to her sexual identity.’ As I discussed in Chapter Three, it alludes to Kristeva’s premise that the female body

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cannot escape the melancholic experience of trying, and failing, to perform matricide.

The double channel installation is installed in *Platform Arts Gallery* in an attempt to explore the gallery space itself – the screens stand apart from each other in a ruptured V formation that attempts to envelop the audience, mirroring the bath that envelops the figure in the video. As Kate Mondloch notes: ‘Cheekily renouncing its role as wallflower, refusing to assume its conventional, discrete placement on or near a wall, the screen asserts itself as a sculptural object.’ I created the screens in that way so that they became an encroaching, yet inviting spatial area – the screens are so large and angled in a way that disorientates the viewer, and positions them in a situation of never-quite-seeing the entire installation. As I discussed regarding other artists in Chapter Three, I have positioned the screens to incite corporeal movement, in opposition to the passive spectatorial position of the black-box of a typical film theatre or video piece. Similarly, the fractured video editing in both screens are an attempt to ‘deliberately take aim at Hollywood-style continuity editing, for example, by exposing the way in which viewers unconsciously make up for the apparent ruptures inherent in the classic shot/reverse shot technique.’ The pillars in the gallery block any complete viewing of the two channels, and the audience must walk around the space to view the videos from either one side of the pillars or the other. To actually capture the video in its entirety in the installation, the spectator must get in front of the pillar, but is so close to the projections that the image becomes blurred, thereby creating a discontinuity between formal narrative and space. In Chapter Three, I discussed the physical movement of the audience in a video installation, its power to readdress issues of spectcularisation and suture and avoid the passivity of cinematic spectatorship. Yet, Catherine Elwes believes that an installation using projection is not as powerful as a physical structure using monitors; she believes that movement is minimal in an installation because it ‘fails to problematise the spectator position’:

The viewer learns little by moving a few inches or even a couple of feet in either direction. Once the viewer has played with her own shadow in the beam of light and gone up close to dissolve the

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563 ibid., p. 18.
image into abstraction, s/he usually settles into the ideal viewing position equivalent to where s/he would have sat in the cinema.⁵⁶⁵

This scathing critique of projected installation, with the childish action of playing with your shadow, could not be further from the truth in the installations of the artists I discussed in my third chapter. Through the installations, their allusions to the physical body permeate the space in between the projection and the walls of the installations so that movement both corporeally and mentally occurs. As a development from the artworks in Chapter Three, the installation of Abluō is specifically positioned to fracture the image through movement of the body. The visitor needs to constantly move between the pillars of the building (whereby the building itself is embedded in the video, alluding to the connection of space and time), the movements create a re-corporalization of the audience; their physical presence makes the work. The audience must navigate around the strange and phallic pillars that block their vision, and move constantly to be able to attempt a full viewing – but this desire for completion is never attained.

![Image](image.png)

**Fig. 58.** Jenny Keane, Abluō, 2012.
Single channel video installation, installation shot.

Walking around the exhibition, the audience can see a blocked off area near the entrance of the gallery that was not viewable when entering the large room. This smaller section of the space reveals a large cast-iron bath.

⁵⁶⁵ ibid., p. 153.
Repeating the strange physicality of the bath that is filmed in the first installation, the audience must get closer to the object to see what is happening. There is a very small video of a shrouded face positioned so that it is barely seen through the plughole. The ‘face’ consists of mostly an eye that stares towards the audience, suggesting a return of the gaze, vacillating with a grotesque mouth that seems to have rather long canines, alluding to the vampire. The video explores issues of disgust and abjection of the feminine, suggesting the corporeality of the female body as being literally washed away – but at the same time, as the work references horror like in such films as IT (TL Wallace, 1990) or Slither (James Gunn, 2006) whereby the monstrosity come up from the plughole, there is a potential for a ghostly and monstrous return. Like the double video installation, this liminal plughole/channel becomes the space between presence and absence.

The voice coming from the plughole in the single channel installation is faint and nondescript, there are sounds of humming and sighing but they are drowned out by the violent dripping sounds invading the space from the other part of the installation. Like the installation of Dark Waters discussed in Interim Three, the sounds mingle together to create a ‘sonorous envelope’ that cocoons the audience. The dripping provides a rhythmic motion almost like a heartbeat, which, as soon as it becomes expected, halts, and then restarts. This fractured sound plays with the position of the body in space. In her essay The Entranced Spectator, Maria Walsh notes that ‘to create a physiological contaminative film,’ experimental filmmakers like Maya Deren used rhythm to capture the unconscious of a spectator, much like a ‘trance-like state’ inspired by shamanism. The affects were Deren’s attempt to possess the spectator in a non-pictorial way. In fact, not just sound, but any part of a film can entrance the audience, as Deren notes, ‘[t]he rhythm of twenty four frames per second, the rhythm of light and darkness in the pictures, the rhythm of varying and repeating speeds in the films affect perception much more than the symbolic value of the pictures.’ Walsh notes that there is something very different between filmmakers like Maya Deren and the Hollywood experience of film. Rather than the spectator attempting to ‘possess’ the film in terms of the spectacle, the spectator becomes entranced by the image, ‘willingly

567 Cited in ibid., p. 117.
controlled and transported by its rhythm.\footnote{ibid., p. 119-120.} Yet, the rhythm of the image and the sound in Abluđ is disjointed and sporadic so that as soon as the audience begins to be absorbed by the rhythm, the spasmodic video returns them to their own bodily experience – and their desire for the compulsion to repeat.

Until now, due to the fact that the work I have previously mentioned has not dealt with it in such a ghostly sense, I have not discussed the essence of projection. Out of all my previous case-studies, the work that most captures this strange quality of projection is Chloe Piene’s Blackmouth, discussed in Chapter Three. While video projection has recently become digitalised through DVD or Blu-ray and data projectors, there is still something unstable and spectral about a projected image. When Catherine Elwes, as discussed above, noted that ‘the viewer play[s] with her own shadow in the beam of light and [goes] up close to dissolve the image into abstraction,’\footnote{Elwes, Video Art: A Guided Tour, op. cit., p. 153.} instead of critiquing this movement, I thought about the ephemeral quality of projection. This strange light that creates an image has a long tradition, one that is decidedly ghostly. Terry Castle discusses this phenomenon in her essay Phantasmagoria: Spectral Technology and the Metaphorics of Modern Reverie. Castle examines the history of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century ‘illusionistic exhibitions’ of ‘spectres’ that were made by magic lanterns – the first ever projectors. Using a concave mirror, not unlike the data projectors of today, the illusionists of the nineteenth-century could project images using light onto the opposite side of a room or theatre. The term phantasmagoria (from the Greek ‘assemblage of spirits’)\footnote{Curtis, Dark Places, op. cit., p. 92.} has a fascinating history, as Castle develops in her essay – it was first used for these theatrical events that used light and mirrors to create imagery. Yet, the word’s more recent incarnation has become the standard allusion, that of ‘a shifting series or succession of phantasms or imaginary figures, as seen in a dream or fevered condition, as called up by the imagination, or as created by literary description’\footnote{From the OED, as cited by Terry Castle, ‘Phantasmagoria: Spectral Technology and the Metaphorics of Modern Reverie,’ in Critical Inquiry, Vol. 15, No. 1, Autumn, 1988, pp. 26-61, p. 27.} according to the OED. Through historical analysis, Castle records the changing explanation of the term, and posits that through the scientific developments of the Enlightenment, a strange ‘spectralization or
“ghostifying” of mental space™ took place. Castle notes that the magic lantern machines were actually developed to disprove ‘genuine’ ghostly activity; these ‘exercises in scientific demystification’ actually gave way to illusionists who traded these ‘phantoms’ for cash. The audience arrived at the shows knowing that the projected images of figures were false but, paradoxically, the images ‘mysteriously re-created the emotional aura of the supernatural.' Castle believes that this enjoyment of fear could be the first traces of what the horror film does to its audiences in contemporary culture; as with the cinema, the magic lantern provided a ‘safe’ and illusionary environment in which to tackle the emotion of fear and horror. While the transformation of ‘physical’ ghosts into the merely ‘things of the mind’ in the Enlightenment, which relegates the spectral into uninformed superstition, this concept actually mutates so that thoughts become an internalization of the spectral – giving thoughts and memories the power to ‘haunt’ us. The word phantasmagoria became linked with the mind and lost its history of mechanical ‘smoke and mirrors’ – but like the strange magic lanterns that created the ‘I know but all the same’ emotional response, the mental processes associated with the term ‘inevitably carried with it powerful atavistic associations with magic and the supernatural. To invoke the supposedly mechanistic analogy was subliminally to import the language of the uncanny into the realm of mental function.' It is not difficult to see the connections here between psychoanalysis and phantasmagoria – the development of uncovering the mind’s spectres through psychoanalytical analysis. This also alludes to Freud’s uncanny of unsurmounted primitive beliefs, that insure ‘against the extinction of the self,’ as discussed in Chapter One. According to Castle, through the development of thought-as-ghosts, it seems as if the uncanny can be traced from the strange magic lanterns of the 1800s – through the repression of external ghosts, we have created internal spectres of ourselves.

How does this spectral imagination link to Abluô? It has not escaped my attention that Terry Castle’s research into the apparitional lesbian (as discussed in Chapter Four) links to her analysis of the phantasmagoric. While the essay about the magic lanterns was much earlier, and possibly not specifically

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573 Ibid., p. 30.
574 Ibid., p. 30.
575 Freud, The Uncanny, op. cit., p. 142.
related to lesbian subjectivity, both of her analyses are relevant to my practice. The ghostly presences in Abluó suggest the spectral lesbian, and like my earlier work, Bitter Sea (After The Hunger), the installation is constructed in three parts – the self, the other and the m/other. Similarly, the desire to desire is suggested in the work, through its shifting spatio-temporality and the space between the images, that creates an unattainable desire for the figures in the installations.

Castle, in The Apparitional Lesbian, notes that the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, which described male homosexuality as 'gross indecency,' was reassessed in 1921 – rather than include lesbians, the members of the House of Lords ignored their presence altogether. Castle notes that this exclusion was ‘not because they deemed the threat of lesbianism as an inconsequential one – quite the contrary - ...they were afraid that by the very act of mentioning it, they might spread such unspeakable “filthiness” even further.’ It is this filthiness that pours from the body in Abluó – escaping onto the floor of the clean bathroom. In terms of the ‘narrative’ of the videos, analysing the phenomenon of phantasmagoria through nineteenth-century writers, Castle notes that the melancholic person was one to supposedly experience apparitional thoughts – the surplus of the melancholic’s black bile created ‘monsters of the mind.’ This melancholic liquid seeping from the hand in the first installation thus links to the face of the almost hysteric figure that is trapped down the plughole – they become one and the same thing. This allusion connects the two installations in the gallery and presents the building as a mental process, a space of the mind where the audience can transverse and traverse. Similarly, by its association to the magic lanterns, projections are uncanny in themselves – but through the stuttering, doubling, and looping narrative the videos accentuate this peculiar emotional state. The strange magic lantern object itself becomes, in a sense, a metaphor for the mind or head, and the projections become the thoughts. Or as Antony Vidler believes the ‘nature of space [is] a projection of the subject thus [is] a harbinger and repository of all neuroses and phobias of that subject.’ Applying this to the exhibition, the doubling of the projection image provides an odd dichotomy between self and other – the two projectors releasing related, but not identical,

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577 Castle notes that according to Robert Burton (The Anatomy of Melancholy, 1621), the melancholiac “imagineth a thousand chimeras and visions, ...talks with black men, ghosts, goblins, etc.” Cited in Castle, ‘Phantasmagoria,’ op. cit., p. 54 (footnote).
imagery creates an anomaly, like a memory of an event that is asked to be recalled by two people. This fractured doubling creates an almost intersubjective space within the installation.

At this stage, it is important to note the difficulty of producing video installation as an attempted intersubjective space. While I will return to the theoretical connections later, I wish to note here that the subversion of spatio-temporality in my installations aims to generate a sense of liminality, which unfortunately is a temporary state. The installation of Abluō tries to create a juncture, a suspension of linear narrative, so that the sense of liminality can be expanded and prolonged. How long depends on the audience themselves – they may stay in this spatio-temporal loop for an extended time, they may stay for mere minutes, but the intention is to construct that in-between moment for as long as they wish to engage with it. As an artist, I cannot, nor do I wish to, force the audience to experience the installation for a particular length of time – as I noted in Chapter Three, this would create a passive spectatoral position similar to the cinema and subsequently sabotage the intersubjective space that I endeavour to generate. Similarly, the audience may not enter the space with the intention to become ‘part’ of the installation for they may only wish to view it as they view cinema – but the visual interruptions (via installation of the screen and the pillar) and constant looping of the images in Abluō attempt to dislodge their preconceived notions of time-based mediums. All that any artist (in all art forms) can hope is that members of the audience will engage with the work on some level.

Returning to the concept of intersubjectivity, Bracha L. Ettinger’s concept of the Matrix could be an interesting way to consider the Abluō exhibition. Not too dissimilar from Kristeva’s chora, Ettinger proposes the Matrix as a ‘prenatal Symbolic space.’579 Yet, of course, this space is very distinct from Kristeva’s chora, because the chora is semiotic, pre-Symbolic. Ettinger writes: ‘The womb and the prenatal phase are referents to the Real to which the imaginary Matrix corresponds. But as a concept, the Matrix is no more – but no less – related to the womb than the Phallus is related to the penis. That is, Matrix is a Symbolic concept.’580 As Griselda Pollock notes on the difference between Ettinger and

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580 ibid., p. 17.
Kristeva, there has not been a way to ‘escape’ the phallic route of psychoanalysis, ‘[e]ven the most sophisticated reconsiderations of these issues, such as those of Julia Kristeva, are formulated within a phallic model. For that model, there is no way of theorising human subjectivity outside the antagonistic model of revolt, negation, and abjection.’ As I discussed in Chapter Three, Kristeva posits the feminine in relation to melancholy because the female cannot escape the bodily relation to the maternal and must become either melancholic by non-negation of the mother, or in mourning from her matricide. Ettinger and Pollock believe that the reason this ‘happens’ is because Kristeva cannot go beyond the Lacanian Phallus – situating the feminine as ‘impossible to think, impossible to signify,’ and the woman subsequently becomes ‘temporarily dispossessed, psychotic in her own body, unhinged from language itself.’ While it may seem strange to discuss the critiques of Kristeva’s melancholic feminine at this late stage, I feel it is important to explore different avenues of the maternal choric, or the matrixial, space – if Kristeva positions the feminine in the melancholic state unable to go beyond it, as Kaja Silverman notes, there must be some other way of ‘point[ing] forward as well as backward – accommodat[ing] transformation and return.’ And that is exactly what Ettinger provides – through her artistic and psychoanalytical research, she provokes an enquiry into the space of the maternal that has previously been othered and binarised.

While I do not have the time in this thesis to delve too deeply into Ettinger’s psychoanalytical and artistic endeavours, I wish to provide a brief synopsis of her theory of the Matrix, as I feel it connects to Abluð. Rather than deny the Symbolic, like Kristeva, which causes not merely the threat of death but total annihilation of the speaking subject, Ettinger challenges Lacan and posits a non-phallic space within the Symbolic – a space that is not structured by binary oppositions. This space is not a substitute for the phallic, but runs alongside it – ‘beyond/before/beside’ and creates an expanded Symbolic. The structure challenges psychoanalysis ‘from within,’ as opposed to effacing it entirely, so that it ‘permits a theoretical breakthrough, going beyond criticism and deconstruction of the phallic logic of castration to open up the possibility

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582 Ibid., p. 35.
585 Ibid, p. 2.
... of a sexual difference [Ettinger] names subjectivity-as-encounter. Ettinger believes that because the feminine is ‘beyond the phallus,’ the Symbolic itself must be larger than the realm of the phallus. The uncanny is a key issue in Ettinger’s research; she notes that when Freud unintentionally contrasted and separated the castration complex from the maternal womb/intrauterine complex (as discussed in Chapter One), he provided the space for the matrixial. Thus the matrixial is not a space of pleasantness or calm, it is frightening – both the phallic and the matrixial, ‘when they threaten to approach the subject in the Real, trigger a similar sentiment of awe and strangeness that lies at the source of the same class of “uncanny” or Unheimlich anxiety.’ Yet in the matrixial, the stranger cannot be rejected:

The Matrix channels the subject’s desire toward the beauty and the pain, the phantasy and the trauma of the Other, with no illusion of mastering it, no power to banish it, no wish to assimilate it, no need to reject it, and where the desire to join the unknown doesn’t promise peace and harmony but rather is profoundly fragilizing.

Ultimately, the matrixial space is that of a liminal and delicate borderspace that challenges the supposed singularity of subjectivity – it is a negotiation between self and other that is ‘without definite resolution.’

Ettinger creates paintings. Neither completely abstract or entirely figurative, these images are made using photocopiers and layers of paint that create horizontal and vertical brushstrokes. She believes that ‘matrixial affects arise in the process of creating and viewing art, and matrixial phenomena inside and alongside the uncanny bear witness to their working-through.’ While Ettinger focuses on her own painting practice, I see the connection to video installation. She writes:

The painting I produce and the one I look at may carry both the rays of a phallic gaze, the extensions of a symbiotic one and the aerials of a matrixial gaze. The phallic gaze excites us while threatening to annihilate us in its emergence to the screen, while giving us the

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586 Ibid.
587 ‘Our reading of Freud’s “The Uncanny” allows us to conclude that the unconscious subject is formed not only by lost phallic part-objects and the split-off or fused phallic Others, but also by matrixial transformations in the co-emerging I and non-I and their matrixial objects.’ Ettinger, The Matrixial Borderspace, op. cit., p. 83.
588 Ibid., p. 47.
589 Ettinger, ‘Re-in/de-fuse’, op. cit.
590 Ettinger, The Matrixial Borderspace, op. cit., p. 111.
591 Ibid., p. 47.
illusion of participation in mastery; the symbiotic gaze invites us to sink inside while threatening to annihilate us together with the screen. The matrixial gaze thrills us while fragmenting, multiplying, scattering and joining grains together, it turns us into what we may call wit(h)nesses: participatory witnesses to traumatic events of an-other at the price of fragilizing and fragmenting us. It threatens us with disintegration while allowing participation in a drama wider than that of our-individual selves.\footnote{Ettinger, ‘Re-in/de-fuse,’ op. cit.}

The installation of Abluô suggests this disintegration, this wit(h)nessing – through the necessary movement in the space and the strange pounding sound of the dripping that invokes the audience’s body, the potential rupture of fragmentation is present. What is strange in Ettinger’s visual practice, however, is the innate flatness of her paintings; I feel that the spatial metaphors that she evokes in her language do not translate to the level surfaces of her two-dimensional images. Ettinger contrasts the phallic realm with the matrixial by saying that both the phallic and the matrixial are ‘informed by mastery (sadism), gazing (scopophilia), and curiosity (knowledge-seeking)’ but the matrixial is different. It is mainly informed by ‘touching, hearing, voice, and moving.’\footnote{Ettinger, The Matrixial Borderspace, op. cit., p. 48.} While she speaks about the fragmented and copied layers of her painting that evoke the matrixial, I would have differing opinions, how can a flat and still image convey the undulating space of subjectivity-as-encounter? As I have analysed through other works in Chapter Three, I believe that the key to capturing a liminal space is a relationship between the spatial and the temporal, which would suggest a practice based on video installation – in fact, unlike painting, I would propose that video installation provides a powerful form of experiencing the Matrix. As I mentioned above, video installation may not capture the intersubjective space because the audience may not be willing to engage with it, yet it provides a spatio-temporal indeterminacy that painting cannot achieve. While there is an interesting haunted quality in Ettinger’s still paintings, as Lyotard notes that Ettinger’s practice approaches ‘the mystery of apparition,’\footnote{Cited in Pollock, ‘Introduction – Femininity: Aporia or Sexual Difference,’ op. cit., p. 12.} the fact remains that the quality of the ghostly is that it appears and disappears, moves spatially and temporally, has no fixed position and subsequently avoids binaries – I feel that a flat (if layered) painting cannot achieve this same quality of liminality that characterises the spectral.
Although I cannot entirely see the relationship between Bracha Ettinger’s paintings and her writing, I support her theory of the Matrix and her connection to psychoanalysis as a means to examine art practice. She believes: ‘The function of psychoanalytic theory for art history may be to expose in art a site of yet unformulated knowledge about sexuality, to clarify this site as a source for ideas that are awaiting significance by language, and to articulate them.’

Thus, her paintings are not about envisaging the matrixial, but of providing a space to provide questions for analysis and a relationship between the artwork and the theory – in the same way that this thesis is formulated. As Ettinger notes art-works ‘extricate the trauma of the matrixial other out of “pure absence” or “pure sensibility”, out of its timelessness into lines of time, and the effect of beauty is to allow wit(h)nessing with non-visible events of encounter to emerge inside the field of vision and affect you.’

To conclude, and to apply the issues of the matrixial to Abluð, I will explore the rhythmic reverberations of the work. Repetition is important to Ettinger’s practice, she writes that the ‘rhythm of repetition created by alternations of

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595 Ettinger, ‘Re-in/de-fuse,’ op. cit.
absence/presence stands for the disappearance/reappearance of the archaic mother, notched and burned into the kernel of the Thing.\textsuperscript{597} The prenatal maternal heartbeat is found in the sound of the dripping liquid, this sound oscillates between a repetitive pattern and a frightening pause. The sound in the work suggests a spasm, as Ettinger notes:

\ldots the spasmatic return of the “same” is never the same, for it carries the marks of the peril of a disappearance in the new appearing. Spasms thus give birth the artwork’s apparition, as a threshold amid recurrence. \ldots Artworking is tracing a spasm in suspension, delineating a recurrent intermittence of disappearance in appearance.\textsuperscript{598}

This reappearing and disappearing can be seen in the single channel video in the bath, the face appears from the blackness revealing itself before disappearing back into the darkness. Only the ghostly voice persists as a rem(a)inder of the figure. Mary Ann Doane notes that the voice is pleasurable for a young child, ‘even before language, it is an instrument of demand.’ Doane notes that through this connection, the voice plays a major role in ‘the construction of space and the body’s relation to that space.’\textsuperscript{599} It creates a hallucinatory power over the subject’s environment, a projection or expansion of the body that fills the space. The voice also provides auditory pleasure because ‘the voice traces the forms of unity and separation between bodies.’\textsuperscript{600} It recalls the soothing maternal voice, and the ‘sonorous envelope’ of the womb. Similarly, the bath as a kind of cleansing womb is repeated in all three videos, alluding to the maternal cleansing and protection discussed in Chapter Two – but the seeping liquid creates a movement between inside and outside. There is something sexual about the sound in the video; its accelerating rhythm implies a climactic moment. This sexuality imbricated with the maternal links to the abject, as I discussed in Chapter Two, but it also alludes to lesbianism which was mentioned in the previous chapter. Ettinger believes that ‘sexuality is the domain where art may be articulated, since we enter both art and sex via the same ‘hole’ in the Real, to use Lacan’s expression, through which bodily experience, drive and jouissance are also presented to the subject.’\textsuperscript{601} She explains:

\textsuperscript{597} Ettinger, \textit{The Matrixial Borderspace}, op. cit., p. 157.
\textsuperscript{598} Ibid., p. 159.
\textsuperscript{599} Doane, ‘The Voice in the Cinema,’ op. cit., p. 342.
\textsuperscript{600} Ibid., p. 343.
\textsuperscript{601} Ettinger, ‘Re-in/de-fuse’, op. cit.
An artwork attaches, suspends or creates desire. An object mysteriously embodies a space in this hole. A drive awakes where an artobject joins forces with interior objects, by-passing repression and regression at the price of approaching dangerously primary sources of Unheimlich – of uncanny anxiety, and appealing to us as beauty or horror, or beauty and horror, inviting the viewer to follow it into an unknown, invisible space – yet inside the visible – interlaced by the artist; inviting the viewer to abandon defences and to weave into the work its own invisible threads – its affect, phantasy, engagement, knowledge.602

In Abluō, the bath’s plughole becomes a manufactured umbilical cord that links the bath, as metaphor for the womb, to a space between the external environment and the site of extreme and inexplicable otherness. Similarly, the double channel video provides a bodily movement connecting the two screens, and provides a rhythmic oscillation between horror and desire rather than a static or ‘psychotically unhinged’ state. This is where the feminine is positioned in Abluō – in between.

602 ibid.
Fig. 60. Jenny Keane, Ablüō, 2012.
Double channel video installation, installation shot.
CONCLUSION

The House, Herself

Women’s representation and self-representation often involve her body as an inner topos. Female sexuality itself is expressed as dermal topography. ... An architectural site, the room is constructed and read as a body. The walls have, or rather are, anatomical textures. They are somatic divides, layers of skin. Space emerges as gendered: a female inner topos, somewhere between the womb and the marsupium, and a fluid geography of intersubjectivity. 603

I began this thesis by invoking the power of the haunted house. Throughout each chapter I examined the power of this anthropomorphizing metaphor in an attempt to analyse how and why femininity had been relegated into the realm of the monstrous and horrific. Yet, instead of denouncing this monstrous connection, I proposed a reordering of binaries so that the feminine could be presented in the site between the normal and the monstrous, between the self and the Other, and between presence and absence. Rather than polarise and subsequently ‘tame’ the horrific which positions femininity back into the binary, I suggest that a subversive threatening of boundaries provides a liminal and intersubjective state of in-betweenness. In terms of art practice, I asserted that video installation, with its spatio-temporal indeterminacy, is the medium that most clearly provides a state of liminality for both artist and audience.

Through theoretical, literary, historical and visual modes of analyses, my research has taken three forms – firstly, the visual practice which culminated in several bodies of work and numerous solo and group exhibitions (as discussed in the Chapters and Interims, and recorded in the Appendices); secondly, an experimentally curated exhibition (Dark Waters, as discussed in Interim Three); and finally, this written thesis. The thesis has explored contemporary case-studies

that I believe work on similar, but not necessary the same, levels as my practice – these artworks employ strategies of horror, liminality, and sexuality in various and ambiguous modes of representation, to tease-out and dissect the challenge of representing femininity. I have also researched the art historical context of female practice in video art and analysed how contemporary artists work with and develop from early feminist video practices. Although the thesis dealt with video installation, the issues of classic cinematic representation of femininity, discussed by theorists such as Laura Mulvey and Teresa de Lauretis, or horror film theory discussed by Barbara Creed, Patricia White, etc., cannot be avoided due to the cinematic conventions that have been assimilated into all moving image practice. Similarly, the structures of (subverting) narrative, the issues of the ‘screen’, and the temporality and spatiality of cinema provided the tools to develop a language for the analysis of video and video installation. In fact, my main reason for undertaking this research project was not only to examine the relationship between women’s art and horror (of which there are many non-video examples), but also to analyse the elusive practice of video installation, which I feel is decidedly lacking in art-related academic studies. If, as Margaret Morse notes, ‘[video] installation implies a kind of art that is ephemeral and never to be utterly severed from the subject, time and place of its enunciation,’ in what ways can art theorists explicate this transient medium? I have inscribed, through language, the relationship between time and space in which video installation occurs, but the visual documentation of a spatio-temporal video installation is difficult. Without seeing the installation itself, how can it be recorded? Having no definitive answer for this problem, my resolution in this body of research is to return to the mode of single-channel video as an experiential surveying of the space. While not entirely perfect or even accurate, it can provide a way to record, if (unfortunately) not capture, the essence of video installation.

Moving away from the troublesome issues of documenting video installation, I would like to discuss the theoretical underpinnings of the thesis. In Chapter One I discussed the three main analyses of horror in the twentieth and twenty-first century – the uncanny, the grotesque and the abject. Each concept deals with

death and the subsequent relationship between self and other, as Elisabeth Bronfen notes:

Social power and control is first and foremost grounded on manipulating and legislating death by breaking any unity between life and death, disrupting the change between the two, severing life from death and imposing a taboo on the dead. Power is installed precisely over this first boundary and all later, secondary aspects of division – between soul and body, masculinity and femininity, good and bad – feed off this initial and initiating separation that partitions life off from death. All forms of ensuing economy – be this monetary, libidinal or aesthetic – are based on this separation.606

While concluding that the three main theories were intrinsically concatenated through their chronological developments starting with Freud – as I discussed in the chapter, the individual terms suggested varying degrees of emotion, from the return of the repressed, to debasement, to a loss of subjectivity. While employing all three terms in the thesis, it is apparent that the abject was my most utilised concept. The reason for this was Kristeva’s exploration of the chora as a site for the intersubjectivity between mother and child, as well as the already deemed ‘Abject art’ of the Nineties that had some theoretical connection to art practices that were firmly (if incorrectly, as I note in Interim One) in place. Yet, like the problems with Freud’s analysis of the uncanny in relation to the feminine and Bahktin’s rather misogynistic view of women when discussing the grotesque, dealing with Julia Kristeva is fraught with issues. Her rejection of feminism, her indeterminate positions between Freud, Klein, and Lacan, and her insistence that homosexuality is maternal desire leading to psychosis, provide compelling reasons to exclude her research. Yet, as I discussed, her construction of language in relation to the body is where her theory stands out in relation to my practice and this thesis, and while I disagree with her position on certain issues (which I have discussed throughout the thesis), I cannot repudiate her absorbing analyses of the maternal body, horror, and liminality. While investigating these states in relation to the masculine subject, Kristeva’s theories explore liminality between binaries, space and time, male and female, self and other, and positions them in a process of interiority, ‘otherness is no longer that which is opposed to me (e.g., the foreigner, the scapegoat, the other sex, another class, race, or nation), but an otherness

Similarly, Kristeva is interested in spatial metaphors that disrupt the traditional concept of space and time so that the past and present, self and other, become intermingled and create, as Stacey Keltner notes, ‘plural and diverse possibilities of meaning and connection.’ The final interim in this thesis began to open up questions into the viability of the rigidity of overly-Lacan-reliant Kristevian theory, but it shows that developments through and beyond Kristeva provided Ettinger, and subsequently my own research, a means to explore an intersubjective state – but one that does not exclude the feminine like Lacan and subsequently (through her melancholic feminine) Kristeva. This evolution of intersubjectivity is one that has slowly developed through the thesis into different analyses of the state of liminality in video installation. While I have cited many theoretical resources to identify the ways in which the artworks mentioned, including the case-studies and my own practice, have investigated the topics under discussion, I believe that the theory cannot ‘explain away’ the strength of the art in question – art practice provides an alternative viewpoint in which to examine concepts of (inter)subjectivity and femininity and cannot be restrained by theory. There needs to be a dialogue between theory and art practices, and one I believe I have achieved in the relationship between my practice-based and written research.

In terms of this relation between theory and practice, and throughout my research, I have explored the issue of narrative. This subversion of linear narrative came directly from the artworks that I created, and the subsequent research about narrative was led by my use of repetition, looping and subversion in my video installations themselves. The artistic and filmic theory that analysed narrative was utilised in an attempt to define why I used these modes of representation, not the other way around. In a similar sense, and because of this research project, curation became a new element in my practice due to necessity. On embarking on my research, I felt that viewing and researching artists that link to my own practice, and writing about them, was not enough – I wanted to work with the pieces themselves and find a way to explore my practice and the theory in relation to them. The exhibition of Dark Waters thus provided a space in which both the artworks and the curation informed the theory. This exhibition became experimental; the work did not just visually

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608 ibid., p. 105.
connect together by having similar imagery or thematic concerns, but they were imbricated so that they became a gestalt. In the exhibition, each artwork worked in relation to the other, and while the videos could be viewed individually, they simultaneously became part of each other, compositional elements of a whole. Through sound, repetition of imagery, and alternative installation, the pieces were enhanced and changed in relation to how they were installed, as traces of other works were heard and felt when experiencing each piece, and bodily movement, memory, and repetition became paramount in the installation of each work. The exhibition, whose creation subsequently permeated into my individual practice and theoretical research, became both incorporeal and embodied, and constructed a rhythmic and liminal space.

The issue of sexuality is explored in various forms in both the practice and this thesis – from discussion of the primal scene (the sexual act), to the subject of Eros and Thanatos (the sexual drives), to the problem of representing the feminine (gender binary), alongside the invisibility of lesbian sexuality (sexual orientation). The relationship between horror, death, and sexuality is a potent one, as Linda Badley notes:

> The cultural obsession, in the age of AIDS, [is] sexuality. At a time when pure, unselective, pleasurable sex means death, every body’s sex (and sexual preference) is everybody’s business. Eros has collaborated with Puritanism in this removal of death, with its myths and rituals of the body, from public view. The shift from supernatural terrorism to horror body language is both a symptom of the repression of Thanatos and a vehicle for its expression.\(^609\)

Sex and death provided the two most powerful interconnections in this thesis, and to art itself. The vacillation between the Freudian sexual and death drives present the subject as a constant slippage between desire and horror, and the art object becomes an uncanny representation of this ‘spasm,’ as Ettinger terms it. And, as Ettinger notes, artworks risk the collapse of identity, ‘the risk of disintegration,’\(^610\) that provides a rhythmic intersubjectivity. In the artwork that I created, and many of the artists’ work that I discussed, this is represented by an allusion to abjection, and a throbbing repetition. For lesbian art practice, as analysed in Chapter Four, this liminality of sex and death provides a powerful

\(^{609}\) Badley, Film, Horror and the Body Fantastic, op. cit., p. 22.

\(^{610}\) Ettinger, The Matrixial Borderspace, op. cit., p. 160.
temporal and spatial environment between the seen and unseen, which challenges heteronormative structures. Simultaneously, and yet not necessarily opposed (for lesbians are also defined under the construct of woman! even if Monique Wittig may disagree.\textsuperscript{611}), the intersubjective experience provides a space to examine the female body, a process that does not reaffirm her as the negative in the mind/body binary.

Within my research project, I have created artworks and a thesis that attempts to describe and/or represent liminality, to present something that is not fixed to the concept of phallocentric order, or, in fact to its binary opposition – Otherness. As I mention in the Introduction, this thesis could not be cyclical, repetitive and liminal like my artworks attempt to be, yet I have endeavoured to create the spatial metaphors of the haunted house in each chapter to incite a movement in space and time and provide a spatio-temporal link between the written and the visual research. My artworks try to create a liminal space, even if they may not achieve it; their interpretations are multivalent and can be construed in different contexts that may or may not realise the outcomes I had envisioned. Yet this is the risk that I, and other women artists, have taken to utilise visualisations of the horrific in an attempt to redefine the rigidity of binaries that are constructed in phallocentric culture. As Ettinger notes in relation to her practice: ‘Theory does not exhaust painting; painting does not melt into theory; painting produces theory and seeds that can transform it. While painting produces theory, theory casts light on painting in a backward projection.’\textsuperscript{612} Rather than being definitive, this open-endedness provides a potential for exploration, revision, and development in subsequent artworks – thus neither this thesis itself, nor the art created, provides any final conclusion, but rather, a pause for contemplation. It unveils a mode for working with, working in between, and working beyond the multiple representations of the horrific.

\textsuperscript{611} Wittig believes that the lesbian is not a woman, ‘a lesbian has to be something else, a not-woman, a not-man, a product of society, not a product of nature, for there is no nature in society.’ Monique Wittig, The Straight Mind and Other Essays, Beacon Press, Boston, 1992, p. 13. While I understand and can theoretically agree with this conclusion, I wish to point out that, unless ‘passing’ as masculine in terms of butch identity (which I do not have time to expound in this thesis), the image of the lesbian cannot be extricated from the image of the feminine. In fact, the power of the lesbian, as I noted in Chapter Four, is this subtle invisibility in her representation.

\textsuperscript{612} Ettinger, The Matrixial Borderspace, op. cit., p. 94.


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All images curtesy of the artists, excluding:

**Fig. 1.** Psycho film still, Alfred Hitchcock, 1960. Captured from DVD, *Hitchcock Signature Collection*, Universal Pictures, 2005.


**Fig. 5.** Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #175*, 1987. C-type print, 119.1 x 181.6 cm. Masters of Photography Website, <http://www.masters-of-photography.com/S/sherman/sherman_175_full.html> (accessed 10/12/11).

**Fig. 8.** Martha Rosler, *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, 1975. Single channel video, black & white, 6:12 mins, video still. UBU Website, <http://www.ubu.com/film/rosler_semiotics.html> (accessed 05/12/11).

**Fig. 9.** Suzanne Lacy, *Learn Where the Meat Comes From*, 1976. Single channel video, colour, 14:00 mins, video still. Video Data Bank Website, <http://www.vdb.org/titles/learn-where-meat-comes> (accessed 05/12/11).


**Fig. 11.** VALIE EXPORT, *...Remote...Remote...*, 1973. Single channel 16mm film, colour, 9.55 mins, four film stills. UBU Website, <http://www.ubu.com/film/export_remote.html> (accessed 05/12/11).


Fig. 29. Exterior image of *The Station*, 21 Queen Street, Belfast. The Station Project Website, <http://www.stationproject.com/> (accessed 04/02/11).


Fig. 41. Catherine Opie, *Self-Portrait/Cutting*, 1993. C-type print, 100.7 x 76.1 cm. LA County Museum of Art Website, <http://collectionsonline.lacma.org/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?request=image;hex=AC1997_24_1.JPG> (accessed 05/12/11).

Fig. 42. Deborah Bright, *Untitled from Dream Girls Series*, 1989-90. Silver gelatin print, 20.3 x 25.4 cm. Deborah Bright Artist Website, <http://www.deborahbright.net/> (accessed 05/12/11).


Fig. 44. Lisa Byrne, *Simultaneous Perspectives*, 2007. Three C-type prints on dibond, 114.3 x 88.9 cm. Lisa Byrne Artist Website, <http://www.lisa-byrne.co.uk/project-simul.html> (accessed 18/12/11).

Fig. 59. Bracha L. Ettinger, *Eurydice No. 45*, 2002-06. Oil and paper on canvas, 24.2 x 29.7 cm. Vegas Gallery Website, <http://www.vegasgallery.co.uk/artists/%3Fartist_id%3D2014> (accessed 18/12/11).
Exhibitions

2012

‘Abluō’ – Solo Exhibition  
(Double channel video installation; single channel video installation)  
Platform Arts Gallery, Queen Street, Belfast.

‘Other Drawings’ Exhibition – Curated by Breda Lynch  
(Drawings from The Lick Drawings Series and The Big Lick Series)  
Ormston House Gallery, Patrick Street, Limerick, Ireland.

‘Intimate Revolution’ Exhibition – Curated by Fion Gunn  
(Breath, single channel video, 2008)  
Siemen’s Art Space, Beijing, China.

‘SCOPE’ Art Fair – Represented by Golden Thread Gallery  
SCOPE Pavilion, New York, USA.

‘London Art Fair’ 2012 – Represented by Golden Thread Gallery  

2011

‘Mirror Machine’ Exhibition  
(Chord, Single channel video, 2010)  
Bluewall Gallery, Cavan, Ireland.

‘Synthesis’ Exhibition  
(Bitter Sea, Triple channel video installation, 2011)  
Platform Arts Gallery, Queen Street, Belfast.

‘(dis)Playing the Other’ Exhibition – Curated by Eoin Dara & Kim McAleese  
(Nightmare on Elm Street from The Big Lick Series, Performative drawing, 2011)  
Catalyst Arts, College Court, Belfast.

‘Contemporary Art and the Moving Image’ Video Screening  
(Excerpt of Ingeminate Battology)  
Queens Film Theatre (QFT), Fitzwilliam Street, Belfast.

‘Dark Waters’ International Video Exhibition – Curated by Jenny Keane  
(Breath, Single channel video installation, 2008)  
The Station, 21 Queen St, Belfast.
Catalyst Members Show 2011
(Succor, Single channel video, 2008)
Catalyst Arts, College Court, Belfast.

2010

'The M-Machine' Exhibition – Curated by Ben Crothers
(Two drawings from The Lick Drawings Series)
Golden Thread Gallery, Great Patrick St, Belfast.

‘PLATFORM 2’ Group Exhibition
(Chord, Single channel video, 2010)
Platform Arts, Queen Street, Belfast.

UKYA (UK Young Artists) Exhibition
(Eight drawings from The Lick Drawings Series)
University of Derby, Derby, England.

‘MisFit’ Group Exhibition – Curated by Niamh Murphy
(Two drawings from The Lick Drawings Series)
Mill St Gallery, Dublin 8, Ireland.

Live@8 - Live Art and Video Screening – Curated by Ann-Maria Healy
(Ingeminated Battology)
No. 8 Gallery, Galway, Ireland.

'Play and Skinned Knees' – Members Exhibition
(Ingeminated Battology)
Catalyst Arts, College Court, Belfast.

2009

Catalyst Student Exhibition – Curated by Kim McAleese
(Three drawings from The Lick Drawings Series)
Catalyst Arts, College Court, Belfast.

‘Warm Moving Bodies’ Event
as part of the 'Exquisite Corpse' Exhibition
(An excerpt from Breath)
Ormeau Baths Gallery, Ormeau Avenue, Belfast.

‘PLATFORM No. 1’ Exhibition
(Two drawings from The Lick Drawings Series)
Platform Arts, Queen Street, Belfast.

‘The Lick Drawings’ Solo Exhibition
(Eight drawings from The Lick Drawings Series)
Limerick Ceramic Works Gallery, Limerick, Ireland.
Conferences

2010

(Conference Paper: ‘Lesbian Representation in Contemporary Video’)
University of Brighton, Brighton, England

‘Evil, Women and the Feminine’
(Conference Paper: ‘The Problem of Representability)
Michna Palace, Prague, Czech Republic

2009

‘Media Modes: At the Intersection of Art and Technology’
(Conference Paper: ‘Fragmented Fetishes: Monstrosity and Desire in Women’s Contemporary Time-Based Art’)
The School of Visual Arts (SVA), New York, USA.

‘Monsters and the Monstrous: Myths of Enduring Evil’
(Conference Paper: ‘Fragmented Fetishes’)

Publications

2011

‘dis(playing) the Other’ Catalogue
Edited by Eoin Dara
Published by Catalyst Arts

‘ABRIDGED 0-23’ Art Magazine – ‘Desire and Dust’
(Chord, Production still)
Edited by Gregory McCartney
Published by Abridged

2010

‘The Monster Imagined: Humanity’s Re-Creation of Monsters and Monstrosity’
Edited by Laura K. Davis and Cristina Santos
Published by Oxford Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2010

‘Platform 2’
Edited by Fiona Goggin
Published by Platform Arts

‘ABRIDGED 0-18’ Art Magazine – ‘Absence’
Edited by Gregory McCartney
Published by Abridged
## DISC ONE

### Video Practice

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## DISC TWO

### The Lick Drawings and Documentation

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**Folder 4 – Abluō Documentation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>File Name</th>
<th>Format/Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abluō.pdf</td>
<td>(PDF, photographic documentation)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>