

Quiet Amplification: The Disenfranchisement of Subjectivity and the Reformation of
Lived Experience

Thomas Phillips

A Thesis

In the

Humanities Program

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

June 2007

© Thomas Phillips, 2007



Library and
Archives Canada

Bibliothèque et
Archives Canada

Published Heritage
Branch

Direction du
Patrimoine de l'édition

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file *Votre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-31119-6
Our file *Notre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-31119-6

NOTICE:

The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

AVIS:

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protègent cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.


Canada

Abstract

Quiet Amplification: The Disenfranchisement of Subjectivity and the Reformation of Lived Experience

Thomas Phillips, Ph.D.
Concordia University, 2007

Central among the claims of this project is the notion that as a theorist of subjectivity, one has an ethical obligation to nurture, rather than to merely dismantle, the self; this, to the extent that theory has an impact on the person whose daily existence is more or less defined by dominant world views that are in turn influenced by intellectual thought. To fulfill this obligation, I propose an elaboration of the general post-structuralist project as outlined in my opening chapters by examining what P. D. Ouspensky calls the “possible evolution” of a self without reverting to outdated models that neglect the effects of the socio-cultural environment. The initial thrust of this elaboration entails theoretical attention to the body, though my ultimate aim is to indicate the potentiality of aesthetic embodiment as lived experience. Though recent years have seen an increased interest in body theory, what remains on the periphery of much theoretical exploration is consideration of physical practices that shape and develop subjective experience. I attempt to compensate for this lack by examining creative texts (written, visual and sonic) that, I suggest, prompt self-knowledge of very particular varieties. My argument is that texts that challenge conventions of narrative or content and, by extension, the immediate experience of the observer, compel us to think and feel differently, as “new,” embodied selves. The text thus functions as a tool (and thus a praxis) in a process of self-reformation. Where my project extends the theoretical work of its forerunners is in its

consideration of a specialized form of religious practice that enlists the immediacy of embodiment and consciousness as a compulsory and highly disciplined source of self-knowledge. This work may be understood as a culmination (one culmination among many, I should add, whose lines intersect, and mutate, in conjunction with others – aesthetic, religious or otherwise) of my endeavor to delineate an art of living in the postmodern world.

“Language provides the very definition of man” (Benveniste, “Subjectivity” 729)

“The struggle against the false ‘I,’ against one’s chief fault, is the most important part of the work, and it must proceed in deeds, not in words” (Ouspensky, *In Search* 228).

**Quiet Amplification: The Disenfranchisement of Subjectivity and the Reformation
of Lived Experience**

Introduction

1. Stirrings of Discontent: A Theoretical Context	14
2. “New Art” and the Psychoanalytic Frame: Promises and Dissappointments	41
3. Reading the Monsters	67
4. Lights Camera Action	104
5. The Masochistic Body	133
6. “Mark the Music:” Microsound and Self-Knowledge	148
7. The “Somaesthetic” Turn: Becoming-Self	170
Conclusion: On Virtue and Becomings	196
Post Script: On Being Able	208

Introduction

My three year old nephew, Compton, is inevitably, though perhaps temporarily, confined to a mode of perception that is inextricably linked to representation. A significant part of his learning process involves playing the identification game – looking at picture books, television, and by extension, everything visual, and identifying what he sees according to the basic taxonomy in which he has been educated. He points. Whatever one is to make of this condition, it belongs to him, and to us, as a mode that defines, and confines, daily experience. As the deconstructionist informs us, “perception is always already representation” (Norris, *Deconstruction* 48); or in Derrida’s own words, “presence, in order to be presence and self-presence, has always already begun to represent itself, has always already been penetrated” (*Writing* 249). What and how we perceive has little to do with objective, hermetic observation, or so it would seem.

In exploring the nature of subjectivity, its various conditions and rules of engagement that define a given milieu, and thus a given self, the question of perception

is, quite obviously, central. In keeping with the general objective of this analysis to foreground lived, material experience, I might begin by pondering whether or not my young relative, bright, charming, enthusiastic, will ever be completely free of the perception to which representation confines him. Will he ever experience moments of sublimity or banality and every modality in between (perhaps he already has?), of self-awareness, that we might call, against all voices to the contrary, pure, unadulterated, uncorrupted, unsanitized? After having completed the core of this book and having worked many years on the question of my own perception, my answer is unyielding but characteristically postmodern – maybe. I believe that, like the rest of us, he may very well be capable of perceiving the most important phenomenon of his life, himself, without the filters and constraints of deleterious (or simply dull) simulacra coloring his insight *if he wants to*. This is, as they say, a big if; the implication being that unhampered perception of one's mechanism requires a decision to undertake the procedure of a particular manner of "looking" and, further, that there may be profoundly challenging obstacles to reaching this decision alone, not to mention observing its requirements. Ways of seeing are many.

What follows here is an examination of subjectivity that begins with what are now traditional theoretical views of the self in relation to certain "requirements" of extending that self beyond the limitations of postmodern theory. By postmodern I mean to imply, with Ihab Hassan, certain "cultural tendencies, a constellation of values, a repertoire of procedures and attitudes" ("Toward..." 147) that permeate, in more or less obvious ways, Western (and arguably most "other") cultures; certain qualities or directions that run against the grain of philosophical, literary and political fixity. Clearly, then, in

employing such a term as “requirements” I run the risk at the outset of alienating those savvy postmodernists who remain wary, and with good reason, of confining the subject even further, of ensnaring this self in a systemic web, a power network whose requisites would subjugate rather than liberate. My only response to such hesitancy, at this point at least, is to suggest that Compton has a difficult road ahead, irrespective of the parameters that he will set himself and those that will, alas, be implemented for him in the wider arena of the social. There are always requirements. What strikes me as the most interesting approach to a life worth living in light of this conditionality is the one that seeks a person’s limitations outside, if I may be so spatial, conventional paradigms that are so overtly fraudulent and self-serving, the very paradigms that postmodern theory tends to dismantle. In the course of this study, I shall address some of these constructions and their own “laws” before turning to possibilities of development on the margins of conventional subjectivities and critical theory alike.

Another personal reference (they will be few and far between). Some time ago, as my preoccupations with theory and what I will broadly call self-development began to dialogue and merge, a friend asked about the nature of my work and I began my explanation by attempting to distinguish between the subject and the individual. The latter term generally connotes a conceptualization of self (in various guises from the Renaissance to the modernism of the late 19th to early 20th centuries) that posits a fundamental stasis of that self and its “essential” qualities, allowing little room for insight into the multitude of deceptive operations that work to inform and circumscribe subjectivity. The subject, on the other hand, is indicative of late twentieth-century critical thought and carries the particularly postmodern connotation of the mutable self conceived

and cultivated through language, as a multitudinous system of signification. This was clear enough to my friend. But as I proceeded to elaborate on the subject's theoretical evolution, I realized that in all that I said there was no mention made of the living, embodied person. It became clear that neither term, neither individual nor subject, was sufficient to express the extraordinary and profound experience of material existence. Moreover, as I reflected upon our conversation, I realized that this was the existence that I wanted to write about and, in so doing, to prompt a reconsideration, and more importantly, a practice, of what it means to function in a lived, embodied life.

I am interested in the living individual who breathes, eats, sleeps, one who reads, views, listens in an infinite variety of contexts. Consequently, this self can occupy any given subject-position, though obviously the latter will determine the quality of that reading, viewing and listening experience, a determination that is especially the case, perhaps, with regard to an engagement with purely discursive texts. I am not suggesting that reading a novel, for example, is an inevitable path to enlightenment. However, like a theoretical text, the novel serves as a tool that directs the reader in particular ways, opens specific lines. Knowledge and its language, of course, is a necessary element in any process of understanding and working with the “stuff” of a given life, a given subjectivity; hence, my efforts to provide a discursive space that is inclusive of both a theoretical and a materialist explication of what it means or can mean to operate as an individual without the absolutist burden of modernist or other fantasies.

The main problem afflicting the theoretical component of such a study (which, I will argue, is not without consequences relative to material life), however, is not only a disparity between terms. Rather, it is, perhaps ironically, the nature of historical inquiry

itself that yields to categorizations, leaving little room for the transgression of a given category until the latter begins its inevitable collapse under the weight of its own forthcoming obsolescence or, more commonly, shifts with the thought trends of a new era. In other words, just as the Cartesian project failed to perceive subjectivity beyond the boundaries of a rational, essential self, so too has the postmodern age prescribed a characterization of selfhood that (generally) precludes a notion of (and, more crucially, a praxis to achieve) agency as a practical, material condition of human experience. I use the term agency with great caution, attempting to conceptualize an experience of integrity that so obviously belies absolute determination. My own notion of this word has little to do with justice, morality or equality as these are generally heralded or lamented in relation to selfhood, conditions that are as dependent upon exterior circumstances as they are upon interior, psychic experience. Indeed, I am ultimately concerned with the degree to which the latter may be cultivated beyond its social and discursive borders.

Of course, the postmodern anxiety of returning to a humanist essentialism is a valid one (as valid as anxiety can be) and provokes clear responses to specific questions. What might it mean, exactly, to possess agency as a self? If we limit the term to a moral framework, one predicated upon the establishment of justice, comfortably amorphous identities and mutually-agreed standards of living, then theory that advocates political activity, in all of its forms and nuances, will suffice. Here agency is primarily a social state. If, on the other hand, we consider agency from the standpoint of its opposite in the form of debilitating, mechanical behavior pervading the human condition (about which I will have much more to say later), the possession of this enigmatic quality turns less on

social justice or questions of identity and more upon an equally dim but not inaccessible *praxis* of individual self-development.

Roland Barthes' potential "non-will-to-possess" in the self/other dyad, a variation of which we will encounter with Kaja Silverman, is suggestive of such praxis:

for the notion of N. W. P. to be able to break with the system of the Image-repertoire [the seemingly infinite collection of dominant, colonizing signifiers with which one may be assaulted on a daily basis], I must manage (by the determination of what obscure exhaustion?) to let myself drop somewhere *outside of language* [my italics], into the inert, and in a sense, quite simply, *to sit down* (*Lover's* 233).

An answer to his question in parentheses is, to a large degree, precisely what I wish to explore in the present study. A simple act, however exhaustive, undertaken on the margins of language, to counter those exterior *and* interior forces that may inhibit not only one's social functioning, but one's ability to *do* anything beyond the coercion of mechanical habit.

A major portion of this discursive space shall be occupied by an explanation of the de-naturalizing mode out of which theories of agency can develop. Chapter one follows the "fixed" individual as a concept that later emerges, in postmodern thought, as the subject produced by ideological forces and psychoanalytic categories of mis-identification. I devote a considerable amount of space to psychoanalytic theory, specifically the work of Jacques Lacan, because, to my thinking, it brings us close to an understanding of the psychic functions that allow for ideology to become naturalized and therefore unnecessary to resist. The work of Kaja Silverman represents an attempt to employ Lacanian theory for the purpose of creating a subversive, productive identification that allows for the possibility of agency in so far as it de-centers normative subject-positions. Her exploration of "new art" that is, in her estimation, central to the

dismantling of hegemonic forces shall be considered in chapter two, along with certain problems that emerge in postmodern theory, including Silverman's, to the degree that it determines the subject without offering a means by which its own determination can be transcended for the conceptualization and the embodied *praxis* of a "new" subjectivity, a necessary complement to theoretical and aesthetic concerns.

Chapter three will present what I view as a profound and effective extension of theory in Richard Shusterman's category of "somaesthetics," in which corporeal and historical experience may be directly observed with the conscious (and conscientious) intent of enabling a praxis of agency and the revitalization of lived life. To expand this category I turn to the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, specifically their notion of "becoming" as it relates to selves in contact with texts. The texts under consideration here, though diverse, are hardly haphazard in their inclusion and order of analysis. They each more or less serve the function of a "somaesthetics" by enacting (via form and [anti]-structure as well as content) what postmodern theory theorizes and, increasingly, move beyond such theory to present the possibility of what I am calling "reformation." They do so by challenging the notion of a cohesive self and proceeding to intimate the becoming potentiality of that self as a productive infinitive – to integrate, to embody – a self whose agency is allowed to bloom in a decisive but minimalist space, discursive and otherwise.

With Deleuze translator Daniel W. Smith, as well as with Silverman, I argue that "one can enter a zone of becoming with anything [to form something "new"], provided one discovers the literary or artistic means of doing so" (*Essays*, xxx). Of course,

Deleuze and Guattari qualify the centrality of aesthetic texts in their work by asserting that

art is never an end in itself. It is a tool for blazing life lines, in other words, all of those real becomings that are not produced only *in* art, and all of those active escapes that do not consist of fleeing *into* art, taking refuge in art, and all of those positive deterritorializations that never reterritorialize on art, but instead sweep it away with them toward the realms of the asignifying, asubjective, and faceless (*Thousand* 187).

Clearly, then, the becoming self remains at the center of a “somaesthetic” enterprise, though it is a becoming that moves, however gradually or rapidly, towards a state of depersonalization, of both art and self. Thus there is no foreclosure on a given text’s meaning here in so far as such foreclosure would presuppose a stasis, an objectification of text and self alike that is so obviously counter to the “blazing [of] life lines.” In my own orientation towards a productive “somaesthetics,” I perform readings, though ultimately, I would suggest, it is the merger between a text-in-process and a becoming-reader, -viewer, -listener, -practitioner, that provides value, aesthetic or otherwise, to the “tool” of art, as opposed to any given interpretation.

Apparent in Deleuze’s own treatment of specifically literary texts is a concern less with identifying reductive, hermeneutic truisms than with marshalling a set of forces that may facilitate a “real” becoming. Such is the project of a literary “somaesthetics” that considers “what use [a text] has in the extra-textual practice that prolongs the text” (*Essays* xvi). The novels that I examine in chapter three, following an initial reading of Nathalie Sarraute’s *You Don’t Love Yourself* in chapter two – Samuel Beckett’s *First Love*, Jean-Philippe Toussaint’s *The Bathroom*, Julio Cortazar’s short story “Blow-up” and Don DeLillio’s *The Body Artist* – lend themselves to such a “prolonging,” on the margins of their textuality, by virtue of their non-totalizing sensibilities. They each exist

as “a small cog in an extra-textual practice” (*Essays* xvi), as Deleuze puts it, but a cog that nevertheless offers a use-value best characterized as a mid-point between what John Hawkes famously calls “design and debris.” In other words, the novels, like other texts under consideration here, are at once deconstructive and reformative with regards to the “bits and pieces” of a text and, ultimately, a life.

Chapter four examines film as “somaesthetic” practice. Three films in particular provide useful examples: David Lynch’s *Mulholland Drive*, Stanley Kubrick’s *Eyes Wide Shut* and Andrey Tarkovsky’s *The Sacrifice*. Whilst filmic experience runs the risk of over-saturating the senses, these examples (particularly the latter two), like the literary texts mentioned above, open the textual space in their unhurried pacing, their cinematographic minimalism, for the viewer to encounter at once a condition of fragmentation and an invitation to participate in the potential reconstruction of the fragments. As should be clear from my primary thesis, both events, the deconstructive and the reformative, are crucial in the move en route to a compelling notion and experience of agency, though the pattern that emerges in the analytical trajectory offered by these particular texts suggests a partiality towards minimalism. This predisposition stands, I hope, as one of few to inform the general direction of a text that is itself, I hope, steadfastly multi-directional.

To lesser or greater degrees, each of the texts under consideration here are challenging, then, in so far as they transgress conventional aesthetic formulas. What this means in relation to the reader, viewer or listener is that the experience of oneself reading, viewing or listening, the embodied action of “somaesthetic” practice, is one of confrontation, between aesthetic expectations and the subversion of those expectations by

the texts. More specifically, such experience invites a confrontation with the immediate “site” of oneself, one’s reactionary and, more often than not, one could argue, mechanical impulses that are foregrounded in the particular space provided by this practice. With every intention to avoid melodrama, I would suggest that this confrontation fosters an experience of suffering – a *productive* suffering that is elemental to a process of self-development. Thus chapter five detours into an examination of masochism as it relates to “somaesthetic” practice, particularly pronounced in the following praxes, and its resonance in the lived life of a self.

Chapter six opens the ears, underscores the act of listening. It continues to explore examples of “somaesthetic” practice by focusing on “microsound,” a “minimalist” music genre that reduces sound, electronically, acoustically, to the basic properties of relative silence and extreme frequencies. The most compelling work in this area, in my view, has come from composers Bernhard Günter and Richard Chartier, whose “un lieu à point efracé, 2eme partie” and “How Things Change,” respectively, I consider in relation to a mode of listening that is provocative of a “new” embodiment and thus a “new” self in so far as the listener is invited to participate in the sonic (and psychic) moment. Here one encounters the potential of a becoming-silence that both exposes and fosters that moment in conjunction with a musical “somaesthetic” praxis.

Having minimized the predominance of the text as link between a given “I” and (aesthetic) experience of that “I,” the logical conclusion is to eradicate the text altogether. To put it another way, one may make of oneself a “text,” not one to be further theorized, psychoanalyzed, deconstructed or determined in a semiotic tapestry of ambiguous meaning, but simply observed, lived, if I may be so bold. In this respect I undertake in

chapter seven to probe the work of G.I. Gurdjieff, whose “system” of self-transformation, I will argue, proceeds where theory leaves off by offering the imperative of praxis in conjunction with knowledge in the service of “living well.”

The discrepancy between postmodern theory and an embodied practice of such “living,” I argue, is one that must be bridged. In so far as the Gurdjieff Work, as it is called, posits a theoretical framework for subjectivity that is in keeping with certain claims by the postmodern theorists I discuss and presents a rich palette of body-centered practices upon which the student may draw, it offers particularly fruitful material for the construction of such a bridge. Within the context of my study, however, it does more than act as the culmination of a series of texts and practices. Indeed, as a radical step in the direction of both identifying the severity of “the postmodern condition” of subjectivity and offering intensive practices through which this condition may be altered, its inclusion here operates as the hallmark of my own contribution to questions of selfhood in the larger context of such investigations.

An additional problem facing the current analysis, and indeed, any academic endeavor treating as broad a topic as “the subject,” is the necessity of citing what has already been done, even at a stage of theoretical development when certain notions have become hackneyed at best. The problem is especially pronounced where considerations of the self are concerned in that virtually every discipline has something to say or ask about selfhood. Consequently, the scholar finds himself or herself sifting through a seemingly infinite number of books and articles that sometimes do little more than collate information and present a fresh take on an old theory – theories of the subject, the body, the soul, the heart, love. And yet alternative modes of writing and reading, even, and

perhaps especially, theory, have a necessary place in this relatively self-serving model. Deleuze in particular is instrumental in providing his own framework (or more accurately, an anti-framework) whereby the *function* of the (theoretical) text, in keeping with those texts I have outlined above, is foregrounded in contrast to a more conventional objectivity of “the Book.” In other words, the Deleuzian text allows one to “do” things with it, to use it in the moment of one’s ever-expanding becoming, regardless of where one “lands” in the text.

We might think of deconstruction’s confrontation with its implication in that which it aims to deconstruct as an example of such productive, textual utility. Like Derrida’s theorization, my own must by necessity be provisional, “sous rature” (“under erasure”), in so far as it seeks to employ discursive material to engage an act of “doing,” an experience beyond the confines of discourse. And like Derrida, I am not interested in simply eradicating theory and its language. Rather, it is my intention to renegotiate a relationship with it whereby its limitations in terms of productive, radical agency, along with its particular efficacy, are acknowledged.

In the interest of streamlining possibilities of experience beyond theoretical politics and abstractions, then, I keep the summary of prior investigations to a minimum and move on to the exploration of embodied practices. For clearly, I am less invested in theorizing the self than I am in suggesting, along with Shusterman and, in his own obscure way, Deleuze, that the reader *try this* with/in his or her body for the purpose of cultivating a richer experience of himself or herself. Whilst my engagement with the critical theory of the day should go a certain distance in distinguishing this project from the somewhat lesser species of the self-help manual, it is nevertheless my sincere wish

that the reader will forgive a reticent postmodernist his indulgence in attempting to help the self.

The form of this “help” nevertheless relies on a particular seizure of the “moment” of the text, be it this one or another – what Nathalie Sarraute refers to, in reference to her fragmented *Tropisms*, as the “hugely amplified present” (vii) of the text. This present, “amplified” but hardly expressive of egoic narrative, is the immediate present of the reading self as much as it is of the text and its biologically-inflected guidance, the present that may be manifested when following Richard Chartier’s suggestion for optimum listening conditions, for example: “intended for quiet amplification...” (liner notes, *Of Surfaces*). Hence the title of the present volume, a tropism in its own right.

One | Stirrings of Discontent: A Theoretical Context

The postmodern subject, in its variation and contingency upon the critical rhetoric of the day, descends from a rich lineage. Rich in imagination and claims to the throne of verity, however multidimensional, that sits immaculately above (and sometimes beside) the populace of every(wo)man, it is a lineage that branches out, through history, in numerous directions. But like the living tree this lineage is grounded, in its enormity, in the root of a single organism - a notion of the subject whose static totality or (ultimately) radical fragmentation are two sides of the very same coin, an interdependency of excessive sufficiency and lack. Excavating the coin from the bark of an outdated arborescence and slipping it into the slot machine of a comparatively rhizomatic paradigm, to use Deleuze and Guattari's terminology, poses a difficult task for the academic writer whose prerogative, by definition, is to communicate clearly, exhaustively, and to contribute to what we might cynically call the congenital inbreeding of scholarship. Given the deconstructive prerogative, "*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*"

(Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 158), the scholar working in and through postmodernity must inevitably confront the vastness of “the text,” its language, its transmissible historicity, without succumbing to the temptation to merely scramble fashionable words into a novel configuration to which others, scholars, will answer. For inherent in any discursive formation is the equally deconstructive turn, my own twist of Derrida’s pronouncement, *il n’y a pas d’en-texte*, at least nothing that may be understood as permanent within the body/psychology of a text or, for that matter, a given self that undertakes some form of textual engagement. The postmodern self, if there is such a thing, is clearly at the center, if there is such a thing, of this tension and the challenge it offers to the practitioner of theory.

I begin, then, a first-person pronoun whose own subject-position stipulates a certain commitment to the past, with an (im)partial history of human agency, from its conception as rational selfhood to that of a splintered, unsettling subjectivity. A text such as Margaret S. Archer’s *Being Human: The Problem of Agency*, though ultimately departing from my own in both its argument and stylistic sensibility (important distinctions that I will address later), lays a useful foundation for this history. She identifies the two sides of the coin as “Modernity’s Man” and “Society’s Being,” representing the hyper-rational, static self/thinker and the postmodern subject of social construction, respectively (10). Where I shall extend her argument, and this history in general, is in consideration of what the texts foregrounding the above theories do or don’t do according to the Deleuzian principles of utility mentioned in the introduction.

The Ideal “I”

To “read” the side of the coin connoting postmodernism and the various categories of subjectivity that have arisen under its moniker since the latter half of the twentieth-century, it is clearly necessary to peer beyond the wreckage of disparate “I’s” and indeterminacy (hardly an accident) to grasp the nature of the solidified self against which postmodern theorists have rebelled and upon which they have been dependent for a reactionary, though, as I will argue, valuable stance in the ongoing struggle for self-knowledge. Whilst an exhaustive tracing of the subject through its philosophical history is beyond the scope or interest of this analysis, I shall nevertheless attempt to highlight two key moments and their corresponding figures that exemplify the positioning of the subject as an essentially unchanging self so as to provide an appropriate context for contemporary arguments that work against the notion of the immutable “I.”ⁱ Classicist A. Cavarero, in her feminist approach to the depiction of women in antiquity, positions Plato “at the start of Western philosophical history, when this initial moment is about to consolidate into a global system of metaphysics” (*In Spite* 9). The “initial moment” of which she speaks refers to a literary and ultimately material form of matricide. Even a passing glance at the work of Plato, however, reveals that the dialectic of desire as played out in the dialogues, with its connotations of power overtly contributing to the effacement of a feminine symbolic order, has a profound impact on the “birth” and “death” of the subject irrespective of gender.ⁱⁱ This is not to devalue Cavarero's focus on gender issues. But for the purposes of the present analysis, the initial concern is with the “moment” of a general, historical entry into the symbolic where the seeds of self-proclamation, self-mastery (self as unity, as presence) and the moral order in which these are thought to

blossom, are dispersed for posterity in the form of the word and its entwinement with “hegemonic reason” (Taylor, *Sources* 22).

What Plato (re)presents, in the guise of textual authority (the character of Socrates in the *Symposium*, for example), is a taxonomy of the self that hierarchizes levels of presence, from textual to human to divine, each embodying a manifestation of Truth. Socrates is presented as the ideal human, a “space” in which human desire culminates in the privileged status of the Athenian lover whose task it is to incarnate and reveal the Truth. He is thus a conduit of Truth and in his words the hearer/reader is to locate himself in relation to and as a byproduct of that Truth or Transcendental Idea (the ideal “Idea” behind or beyond the human incarnation).ⁱⁱⁱ

In the *Symposium*, then, the fully-developed human is the one who recognizes himself as an expression of the Ideal Other, an individual voice that speaks the language of Truth, the source of which is at once present (as manifested in the subject) and otherworldly. As will become evident throughout this analysis, the notion of the subject as constituted in and by otherness is, in a sense, the adhesive that binds the multitude of philosophical traditions that have treated subjectivity. Charles Taylor’s extensive volume *Sources of the Self* provides an “inescapable framework” for this notion by virtue of which Reason, and perhaps more crucially, morality, assumes the *raison d’être* of being and the search for self-knowledge. Though points of departure between philosophers are undeniably relevant to Taylor’s historical endeavor, the emphasis on the consistent centrality of rational and moral development, a “sense of moral sources” (*Sources* 111), permeates his study, whether he is discussing Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, the Epicureans, or Locke, etc. Even Montaigne, whose embracement of “flux and mutability,” to quote

David Sylvian, contributes to a relatively modern and individual-oriented “first-person study” (181), foregrounds a self that “is both made and explored with words” (183), the tools of an “inescapable” Reason.

Amidst this framework, what we might call a qualified uniformity of self-examination, I will consider a second significant moment in the Renaissance philosophy of René Descartes. In keeping with the Platonic privileging of mental capability over material substance, Descartes grounds, indeed, solidifies the individual in the capacity of thought, thought which can in turn be converted into language. In his *Discourse on Method*, he makes the infamous claim that “I think, hence I am” (170-71), positing himself as an individual whose existence is coterminous with rational cognition. The “I” is, in the Cartesian scheme, a machine that can be known by its parts, parts that exist independently of phenomena external to the mind.

Thus the narrator, the “I” behind the text, “imagines that he speaks without simultaneously being spoken ... believes himself to exist outside of discourse” (Silverman, *Subject* 128).^{iv} Kaja Silverman points out that in spite of Descartes’ individuality (his “being”), as substantiated by rational thought, “he does not, however, call into question any of the commonly held assumptions about individual man, and consequently his interrogation leads only to the re-establishment of the Christian world” (*Subject* 127). So the transcendental presence of God, then, along with mental processes and concepts that may be construed as emanating from God, for Descartes, exist “independently” of discursivity. The “I” in which the philosopher anchors his “being” is the child of the marriage between Reason and Divinity.

Just as Plato's Socrates aspires to a level of rationality that is conducive to the expression of Truth, the Cartesian "I" thinks and uses reason to substantiate its identity. In both cases, the *expression* of a fundamental capacity to *be* is ultimately traceable to an external source. For Plato, this source takes the form of the Idea, whilst Descartes thinks and "exists" in relation to God. Derrida famously refers to this source as the "transcendental signified" ("Structure..." 85), a fundamental concept, as derived from Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistics, that is thought to transcend the phenomenal world (by such figures as Plato and Descartes), including those manifestations of its own "activity" such as human rationality. Of course, Derrida's "central signified" ("Structure" 84) connotes a vastly different significance than those of the earlier philosophers. Derrida is interested in the de-centralization of the "transcendental signified," its splintering into a dissemination of meaning. Both Plato and Descartes, on the other hand, seek a central orchestration, a teleological presence, the stability of which parallels the rational essence of the individual. What each of the philosophers share, however, in spite of the disparities between histories and sensibilities, is a grounding of the individual/subject in otherness, be it otherworldly or the site of difference and infinite, playful signification. Naturally, the form of otherness carries certain implications. For Plato and Descartes, the individual's origin in the other precludes the possibility of discursive, indeed, social construction. For Derrida, the subject is bound to the constraints of discursive indeterminacy. The widespread influence of deconstruction alongside enduring presumptions of "being" (I think, hence..., I shop,..., I love,... etc.) is testimony to the fact that both sides of the coin manage to land face-up in contemporary life.

Whilst the strategy of locating the subject within the confines of otherness remains consistent, the concept of subject-as-referent becomes tremendously complicated in twentieth-century postmodern theory. Moreover, the notion of the other is broadened beyond traditional categories of the Divine, Reason and Logos. Indeed, where solidity once reigned as the crowning characterization of self, postmodern theory heralds a fragmentation of that self. And where Transcendental Presence once occupied an ontologically privileged position, there are discovered gaps and inconsistencies to be celebrated in the cult of absence. Postmodern exploration into the self and its origins continues a long-standing tradition, albeit according to alternative mandates.

The commencement of this tradition, as I'm laying it out here, suggests two traits common to the earliest of the writers mentioned above. First, there is clearly a sophisticated level of self-reflection in their work ("I" do this or that, "I am," "we are"). But the predominant function, the central operation of these texts, is to instruct; this is what they *do*. They employ reason to engage problems of being or non-being and present arguments that situate the self in relation to otherness, "Modernity's Man" coursing through the epochs with wits and cognitive sustainability firmly intact. As we jump ahead to "Society's Being," however, what emerges is both a subject that is invariably susceptible to social forces (to the extent that this "man" is nothing more than a "gift" of society, and, correlatively, a textual practice that *does* something more and something less than instruct a reader. I will suggest below that what the postmodern text generally does is invite and foster discomfort.

The Other Side of the Coin

At the start of this paper, I cite Emile Benveniste's grand statement that "language provides the very definition of man" ("Subjectivity..." 729). Such a view obviously stands in contrast to an understanding of the individual as an intelligent creature who creates and uses language as a tool, an individual employing an object. Rather, in Benveniste's model of subjectivity, language is construed as an inherent "constituent" of the human animal and his or her process of subjective formation. Thus, "it is in and through language that man constitutes himself as subject, because language alone establishes the concept of 'ego' in reality, in its reality, which is that of the being" (729). Recent autobiography studies corroborate this view: "It is by means of language (*graphie*) that self both achieves itself and has access to depth..." (Gunn, *Life/Lines* 8-9). The interplay, then, between the "individual," language and the concept of "I" (thought, spoken or written) that follows is the essence of the subject; or, to be more specific, the speech act (along with the first person writing act) is the subject-defining act. Indeed, the two inform one another. "Language is possible," Benveniste claims, "only because each speaker sets himself up as a subject by referring to himself as I in his discourse" (729).^v The equation is expanded by the inclusion of another subject who participates in the discourse (as interlocutor or reader) and is denoted by the pronoun "you," providing the initial subject with further means by which he or she may define himself or herself, ie. as not "you."

In his Marxist/psychoanalytic-oriented "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," Louis Althusser elaborates on the defining nature of the "other" pronoun in his discussion of "hailing" ("Ideology..." 245-46). Simply put, the subject responds to

the spoken pronoun “you,” the hail, thereby identifying himself or herself with a verbal signifier in the mere act of turning towards the sound. In other words, the hearer comes to occupy a space (both psychic and linguistic) that was previously foreign. The identification is strengthened when the speaker has been endowed with authority, a policeman, for example, thereby appending the status of “accused” to the otherwise empty signifier.

To this discussion could be added a further example whereby the subject’s sense of self is similarly reinforced and, to a great extent, dictated. Walking down a street and confronting the numerous gazes of passersby, every gaze appears to be different. One seems critical whilst another is alluring; one is despondent whilst another reveals a comic preoccupation; still others present themselves as neutral. Upon reflection, one will observe that one’s initial reactions to each gaze may in turn produce questions about oneself as recipient of the gaze, questions that are determined primarily by one’s immediate interpretation of the gaze. “Am I ugly?” “Am I particularly attractive today?” “Is there something wrong with me?” And so on. Each gaze signifies a judgment that is dependent on the presence of an “individual,” oneself, and thus comes to form a kind of visual discourse in so far as a gaze is projected and *perceived*, an exchange that I will call the discourse of the look.^{vi} Whether or not each marker of signification in this discourse, each gaze, is imbued with the meaning that one presumes to fuel its activity is irrelevant in terms of subject formation. What is crucial here is the psychical reflex that is sparked within/as one’s perception, the line of questioning that grounds the recipient in a nebulous subjectivity by constantly shifting thought in the direction of a self that is in

process of being identified, judged and, ultimately, concretized. If “I” am dependent on such a process, then “I” am nothing more than a pastiche of arbitrary signification.

And yet, as noted above, the gaze connotes an action whose arbitrariness must be qualified by the fact that it is potentially informed, or rather, directed by a prescribed orientation. The term for this inscription, which Althusser associates with hailing, is interpellation, defined as the “process through which the human being is constituted as a subject through its relation to the ideological practices of society” (Mowitt, *Discerning* xii). Ultimately, then, the hail is pivotal in the interplay between the subject and the environment (linguistic, visual, etc.) in which he or she participates; between self and other. I have already stated, in relation to the gaze, that both participants in the visual exchange, the one who looks and the subject who receives the look, come to be agents of ideological force. Of course, the exchange can also revolve around spoken or written language, as it does in the literal act of hailing, and, indeed, can take a variety of forms.^{vii} There remains the question, however, as to the nature of the interpellative process. Where does it originate and who or what is responsible for its function?

In her essay “Constructing the Subject: Deconstructing the Text,” Catherine Belsey illustrates Althusser’s argumentation on the subject of ideology. She maintains that “ideology [works to suppress] the role of language in the construction of the subject” (358), thereby making it possible to veil its activity, its hold on the subject. “As a result,” she continues, “people ‘recognize’ (misrecognize) themselves in the ways in which ideology interpellates them, or in other words, addresses them as subjects, calls them by their names and in turn ‘recognizes’ their autonomy. As a result, they ‘work by themselves,’ they ‘willingly’ adopt the subject positions necessary to their participation in

the social formation” (358). So the process of ideological construction unfolds within the subject as a response to an external “call.” This subject is thus implicated in the activity of his or her own subsumation by ideology and is, as Althusser puts it, “the constitutive category of all ideology, whatever its determination (regional or class) and whatever its historical date – since ideology has no history” (“Ideology...” 244). In other words, it is an illusory matrix of cultural and social forces that constitutes force nonetheless. Though still we must inquire into the impacts of such forces and their bearers. Who or what makes the call? Who or what acts to veil the discursive medium of its attempts to interpellate the once cherished individual?

As Michel Foucault and his followers have demonstrated, the intersection of language and ideology is inevitably laden with power – power as a configuration of forces (a network, in Foucauldian terms) that permeates societal institutions and the individuals who participate in them.^{viii} Working in the tradition of Foucault, discourse analyst Norman Fairclough, for example, maintains that “the exercise of power, in modern society, is increasingly achieved through ideology, and more particularly through the ideological workings of language” (*Language 2*). It is as a conduit, then, that language, in its individual manifestation (*parole*), be it in the form of a literal “hail,” the well-crafted words of an advertisement or the discourse of an image, etc., functions as the perpetuation of a given ideology. But power, the “entity” *behind* discourse (to use Fairclough's model), is hardly individualized. It cannot be reduced to a single instance or utterance. Nor can it be definitively located in an “individual” or even an institution. This is not to ignore those moments in which real authority is abused and real pain (physical, emotional, etc.) is suffered. On the contrary, the acknowledgment of and *resistance* to

such abuse is often the ultimate aim (and extension) of theoretical practice, as it is for both Foucault and Fairclough.^{ix} And yet, in so far as power is conceptualized as amorphous rather than static, as “omnipresent” and phantastically ideological, in addition to being localized, it is revealed (unveiled) to be a far more prodigious phenomenon, the effect of which is felt beyond instances of overt domination and submission. It is, in Fairclough's words, “the power to *create* the [subject] in the image, so to speak, of the ideological ideal” (103), the latter being manifested as a subject-position that is most compliant with the demands of a given ideological structure. The answer to the question of the responsibility and origin of the interpellative function, then, lies as much in the individual's proclivity for sub-jection as it does in the forces of ideology that work through the mediums of human rapacity and discourse to substantiate their dominion.

It is, in fact, the body/self that succumbs to the colonizing forces of power. As Timothy W. Luke puts it, “no bodies issue forth on their own without the mediations of intentional action and disciplined interpretation in both the body politic and the body shop” (“Politics...” 87). In order to bring the Foucauldian scope of such “action” more ominously into the purview of a discussion of interpellation (though “The Body Shop” to which Luke alludes here is not without its dire implications), we might consider the example whereby the “hail” of an authority figure is quite literally envisaged as a (potentially) ever-present demonstration of power. For Foucault, the act of surveillance is among the primary modes of social control that operates to “create” the ideologically ideal subject. Nowhere is the impact of this mode more apparent or effective than in the notion of panopticism represented in the invention of the Panopticon, a circular tower situated in the center of a prison that is itself circular, allowing a guard (who cannot be

seen) visual access to any given cell at any given time. The prisoner is thus sentenced not only to confinement but to the total deprivation of privacy. As a result, he or she is made vulnerable, through constant exposure, to the observation of a guard (who may or may not be occupying the tower) and, by extension, to his or her self-consciousness as a subject of the gaze.^x

Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* has been with us since 1975, its model of invigilation a well-known premise. Like most of the theories set forth in this chapter, however, it remains more or less germane to the haunting of everyday colonization (the exceptional ability of the Panopticon to re-create in the inmate a vision of its own domination without recourse to any tactic other than sight; the subject caught in the infiltrating gaze of a Body Shop advertisement). For in such a "system of surveillance," Foucault claims, "there is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by internalizing to the point that he is his own supervisor, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself" (quoted, Miller 222-23). This interior fascism, then, emerges out of a "disciplinary society" that "make[s] it possible to bring the effects of power to the most minute and distant elements. It assures an infinitesimal distribution of the power relations" (Foucault, *Foucault* 206-07). We, most of us, continue our minute trajectories as recipients of self-cultivating mythologies.

In order to grasp the Althusserian and Foucauldian models in their reduction of the subject to "its" 'minute and distant elements,' I would argue, it is necessary to probe deeper into the question of how the relation between subject and object is constructed – the constitutions of the two "entities" and the force of desire that melds them.

Psychoanalytic Selves

Standing in stark contrast to the Cartesian “I,” the postmodern notion(s) of subjectivity figures a self, as I have demonstrated, that exists in so far as it responds to various stimuli – an interplay in which the actions of both the self and the other (via identification and interpellation) are equally significant. Such a subject, it seems, is an accurate reflection of the postmodern milieu, in a world whose impact on individuals, as a result of tremendous technological advances, cannot be ignored.^{xi} And yet, this “new” conceptualization of subjectivity is not without its problems, particularly in those societies where the rapidity of progress (both technological and ideological) is paradoxically undermined by conservatism, a conservatism that is often proffered by the very proponents of “progress.” Describing the challenges that women must face in the present epoch, Belsey asserts that “women as a group in our society are both produced and inhibited by contradictory discourses. Very broadly, we participate both in the liberal-humanist discourse of freedom, self-determination and rationality and at the same time in the specifically feminine discourse offered by society of submission, relative inadequacy and irrational intuition” (“Constructing...” 359). Perhaps, then, the matricide that Cavarero relates historically to the moment of consolidation “into a global system of metaphysics” in antiquity is not so very distant from current practices that “kill” the “mother” at the same time that they construct and restrict the feminine ideal (the ideological ideal) as domestic care-giver, as sexual object and ultimately, as subject defined by lack.^{xii}

Obviously, the postmodern subject or “Society’s Being” is vulnerable to potential circumscription in numerous subject-positions, race, ethnicity, class and sexual orientation comprising the predominant field of roles. The process of such interpellation is synonymous with the subject’s evolution in relation to discourse as other. The process is evolutionary in that the subject emerges in response to an infinite number of discourses that are themselves heterogeneous – discourse as speech, writing, visual image, audibility, etc. – and informed by ideology. When the dimensions of discourse are expanded even further, however, into the human psyche, where some philosophers have presumed a space to exist that is or once was unclouded by ideological influence, the postmodern theorist finds that not only is such a presumption unfounded but that it is contrary to the “natural” development of the human, social subject.

Thus, psychoanalytic theory conceives of a self as evolving in relation to what it observes as inevitable stages in the average life span, beginning with, for Lacan at least, a selfhood that is hardly stable.^{xiii} Here, the process is characterized by the ongoing adaptation to discourse of another variety – that of the unconscious and the Symbolic Order, or the site of convergence between social experience and language. As such, the process as put forth in psychoanalytic theory is in no way impervious to ideology. Indeed, the work of Lacan and his predecessors goes even further in lifting the veil of the mythologized static self to expose a fundamental misrecognition that is sustained from the “moment” of infancy into the experience of adulthood.

Paul Smith, whose own overview of the history under consideration here, *Discerning the Self*, is aligned with my own project in so far as it examines historical and potential agency, makes the claim that the subject “is most easily defined as the place

where ideology takes its effect” (69). So far I have considered otherness and its unique expression in the form of ideological/discursive interpellation as an inevitable (and formidable) element in the “moment” or at the site of subjectivity. But there may be said to exist many “sub-sites” at the level of the “place” of the subject, a notion that complicates the act of interpellation by interrogating both the initial instance of ideological maneuvering and the subject’s incorporation of and resistance to what it perceives (or does not perceive) as other. Smith goes on to claim that “if anything comes out as an injunction from the work done on the subject in the Freudian/Lacanian mode, it is the necessity of taking into account the way in which human action ... is *never not mediated by the unconscious*” (72-3). The latter is but one site in the psychical makeup of the subject, though, obviously, a pivotal one.

My intention here is to explicate the postmodern subject in its psychoanalytic incarnation, as an “entity” forever in the process of negotiating its destiny via the unconscious. Such a process involves a number of key stages where the various “sites” of the subject unfold or collapse depending on the particular (historical) circumstances of the subject, a process that extends, as already mentioned, from infancy to adulthood. Thus, I will conclude by fleshing out, so to speak, the evolution of the psychoanalytic subject by providing examples of its embodiment as cultivated (through participation in society) in mature life.

Lacan defines the unconscious as “the dimension in which the subject is determined in the development of the effects of speech, consequently the unconscious is structured like a language” (*Four* 149). Perhaps the definitive statement of Lacanian theory, Lacan’s ascription of a linguistic structure to the unconscious serves to locate the

subject within a larger framework than that of the social. Indeed, the psychic functioning of this subject is dependent on various categories of otherness, categories that are by no means exclusive of discourse. And as I have already suggested, the concept of discourse is not limited to speech or writing. We may, in fact, go so far as to say, in keeping with the Lacanian statement, that *any* form of human expression and experience is structured like a language. Nevertheless, the crucial issue lies, for Lacan, in the determinative role of the unconscious, a “dimension” located “exactly *between* the field of the ‘subject’ and the field of the Other, and imbricated in both ...” (Smith, *Discerning* 71). Now in order to understand the nature of both the position of the unconscious within the psyche and its part in the determination of the subject, it is necessary to specify what is meant by the “fields” of the subject and the Other in relation to Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. I shall consider the latter of these first, as it is, paradoxically, the first in order of “inception.”

To begin with, the Other^{xiv} may be understood as synonymous with the symbolic to the degree that it is “the locus of speech and, potentially, the locus of truth” (Lacan, *Four* 129). It is a “realm” that is constituted, first and foremost, by the signifying faculty of language. Again, language as a system of signs and signification is capable of constructing the subject in so far as the subject identifies with a given designation. However, by emphasizing the presence of a self to perceive and, quite possibly, to produce “truth,” Lacan expands the category of the Other, the symbolic, to include signification issuing from a variety of sources. From the fundamental realm of language, signification, in his scheme, proliferates from the mother, the father, the person on the street whose gaze “reads” like a poem, the “endowed” male, the “castrated” female, from the object of fetishistic delight, etc. The Other, in its variety of manifestations, abets the

subjective process in the subject whose desire or repulsion for what he or she perceives outside himself or herself aligns him or her with a subjectivity that develops out of identification with the Other according to the dictates of that desire or repulsion.^{xv}

The Other is an “entity” grounded in language (the structure of language) but nevertheless becomes manifested in the flesh, as a (primarily) visual object. The “field” of the subject, on the other hand, as mentioned above, is less tangible. Like the phantasm of ideology as conceived by Althusser, here the subject is presented as what “was previously nothing if not a subject coming into being” (Lacan, *Four* 199), into the domain or unconscious experience of signification. Whilst “nothing” remains rather vague, we still get a sense of the productive capacity of the symbolic and the subject’s inevitable accumulation of self-knowledge via the Other. Of course, Lacan must still reckon with the corporeal, the actual person over whom the subject casts its shadow. For this task, he discusses a number of “moments” undergone by the infant that are reinforced throughout the process of maturation. In so doing, he shows the subject to be less a metaphor than a manifestation of existence as qualified by the vulnerability of the impressionable child, the adult whose core is absence and lack.

The first “moment” involves a specific need (hunger, change of position, etc.) that is incommunicable, in so far as the subject lacks language ability, and is thereby expressed in the form of a general “request.” From the discrepancy between the need and the inability to communicate that need, as well as from the deprivation of a signifying relation with the maternal presence, there arises “a desire ... that exceeds simple biological need [and] contains the contradictions that will define sexual life” (Brenkman, “The Other...” 417). Signification, then, is at once a governing force in the “process” by

means of an essential lack produced by the infant's communicative and subsistent fragmentation and a point (both material and symbolic) located within the maternal other that substantiates this lack to the extent that it represents a remote, though "infinitely appeasing" love. Thus, the infantile subject is,

on the one hand, the effect of speech, that is, of the combinative interplay of the unconscious signifier whose inscription results from the dialectic that transpires between the body and the other. On the other hand, the subject depends upon the signifier, which comes to him from the Other even though, as an *infans*, he cannot as yet integrate into his own signifying activity, the request (Brenkman 418).

With the birth of desire and the inevitable incapacity to fulfill (or indeed, to articulate) that desire, the subject, too, is born.

The second "moment" in the infant's life that is responsible for its subject-development works in co-operation with the symbolic to reinforce the dialectic of desire. Lacan's well-known "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" considers the role of the subject's mirrored reflection to be determinative of an initial alienation between self and Other. Schematically, the scenario unfolds in the following manner: the infant perceives his or her image at a point in life (six to eighteen months of age) when he or she is unaware of an autonomous self and has succumbed to a sensation of the (uncontrollable) body's fragmentation. What appears before the infant in the mirror, however, is a fully-constituted "individual" whose exploits (moving, expressing, etc.) he or she sees as at once heroic and enviable. The infant, then, in an effort to escape physical fragmentation (preceded, of course, by the psychic fragmentation of the previous, perpetual "moment"), assumes the identity of the figure in the mirror whom Lacan, in reference to Freud, paradoxically calls the "Ideal I." Paradoxical, because this "I" is a mere projection, a fabrication, a "form [that] situates the

agency of the ego ... in a fictional direction ...” (Lacan, *Ecrits 2*). Consequently, the stage that is so crucial to the subject's formation is founded on a fundamental misrecognition, or *meconnaissance*. The object of misrecognition, the “Ideal-I,” becomes imbedded in the unconscious and thus in the play of signification that “speaks” the subject into existence.^{xvi}

Whilst the various stages overlap and shift in order of occurrence, it is clear that a fundamental property of each stage is the necessary oscillation between fulfillment and lack. For the illusion of the former is necessary to the sustenance of the ego in light of the reality, in the Lacanian scheme, of original and perpetual lack, the original “nothingness” of the subject. In the mirror stage, the infant psychically misidentifies himself or herself in order to compensate for the physical experience of the body’s uncontrollability that is clearly a signifier, consciously or unconsciously, of lack.

Likewise, the imaginary stage functions according to a similar dynamic. The imaginary, like the unconscious, may be understood as a “dimension” occupying a space in the human psyche in which signification is negotiated and ultimately foreclosed. However, whilst the unconscious, in its signifying activity that remains at a distance from the corporeal subject, poses a “potential disruption of the symbolic order” (Belsey, “Constructing...” 359), the imaginary capitulates, as it were, to the symbolic. It does so by virtue of the force, however illusory, of imagistic plenitude, its function as a reservoir of unadulterated or infantilized images. So if the unconscious is comparable to the Id, in so far as it “houses” individual desire that may or may not be conducive to the “meaning” offered by the symbolic, the imaginary is more in line with the super-ego that attempts to harness the taboo or lack of control. The foreclosure of meaning that takes place in the

imaginary thus has as its purpose the institution of a subjectivity that is not only acceptable but operational according to the demands of a self-seeking “I” with pretensions to unity and wholeness. The imaginary is exemplary of the subject’s strategy to ease the predicament of fragmentation and, moreover, a stage that is infinitely reproducible in the form of ideology as the images of perception multiply and adulterate.

Following the mirror stage, then, is a lifetime of *meconnaissance* “that will henceforth link the I to socially elaborate situations” (Lacan, *Ecrits* 5). Lacan continues:

It is this moment [post-mirror stage] that decisively tips the whole of human knowledge into mediatization through the desire of the other, constitutes its object in an abstract equivalence by the co-operation of others, and turns the I into that apparatus for which every instinctual thrust constitutes a danger, even though it should correspond to a natural maturation – the very normalization of this maturation being henceforth dependent, in man, on a cultural mediation as exemplified, in the case of the sexual object, by the Oedipus complex (5).

This passage introduces the extent to which culture serves to create and enforce (“mediate”) the imago, the “Ideal –I” that the subject takes for reality. As another subjective dimension, what Lacan connotes as the “real” stands in contrast to both observable, corporeal reality and dream states. It is “what the dream has enveloped, hidden from us, behind the lack of representation of which there is only one representative” (*Four* 60). It stands in relation, however abstract, to the “apparatus” of the “I” whose instinctual “danger” would seem to pivot upon the desirability, and the inaccessibility, of the real.

It is precisely the identification of this real and its dangerous correlation to the inquiring subject, I would argue, that yields the function of a text such as “The Mirror Stage” essay. In other words, what the text does is to provoke the discomfort of the real. Certainly such “danger” is apparent in other postmodern texts – the opening of Foucault’s

Discipline and Punish that depicts, in graphic detail, a scene of relentless torture whereby a person is literally, physically fragmented; or a relatively “safe” passage from Judith Butler: “subjection is a kind of power that not only unilaterally *acts on* a given individual as a form of domination, but also *activates* or forms the subject” (Psychic 84). What such postmodern texts do, then, is foreground both lack and the degree to which artificial “dreams,” cultural as well as nocturnal, construct something (a subject) out of nothing (images, for example), leaving cherished aspects of self-identity, theoretically at least, in shards.

Some examples of how the real is obfuscated in various cultural operations, according to a Lacanian model, as well as how such operations might begin to be subverted by a self, will be appropriate here.

Cultural Creations

Leaving the Oedipal model to remain in its own rich corpus of signification, I shall turn instead (as a gesture towards what is to come with regard to aesthetic practice) to the visual arts, specifically photography and cinema, to illustrate the subject’s cultural inheritance in the psychoanalytic scheme. Clearly, what these mediums share in terms of structure in relation to a viewer is the apparatus of a “screen.” And like the look of the biological eye that is transformed into the ideological gaze *within* the looked-at-subject, this “screen” is predisposed to the production of subjectivity as ideological “Ideal.” An over-simplified conception of photography, of course, maintains that the static image captures or freezes a moment in real time, thereby rendering the image free of “intent” on

the part of the photographer.^{xvii} In contrast, cinema, I would argue, tends to be “consumed” with an underlying nod towards its narrative conventions and fantasy.

In ascribing such awareness to cinematic viewership, I am both getting ahead of myself and contradicting what have become key theoretical assertions regarding the interpellation of the subject via the visual arts. Indeed, photography, at least in its popular manifestations (magazine advertisements, for example), like cinema, presupposes a viewer who will incorporate the photograph into his or her personal repertoire of self-images (the image-repertoire). In so doing, the photographic act becomes aligned with ideological maneuvering. In his analysis of the evolution of Barthes’ career from structuralist to post-structuralist, Martin Jay maintains that “instead of invoking the analogical function of the photograph as an ‘obtuse’ antidote to the ‘obvious’ workings of narrativized ideology, Barthes linked it with Lacan’s Imaginary, implying a certain distrust of the *meconnaissances* it engendered” (*Downcast* 446). What concerns Barthes in the latter part of his work, then, is precisely the “intent” of the photograph that becomes internalized in the viewer as a “natural” response to the image, a response that may ultimately be, in the psychoanalytic view, ideologically codified.^{xviii} The misrecognition occurs as the viewer misidentifies himself or herself with a particular aspect of the image in a manner not unlike that which is enacted as an infant in front of the mirror.

In addition, the interpellative process is not limited to the act of viewing an image but is equally and, perhaps, more profoundly effective in the act of the subject’s being photographed. “Once I feel myself observed by the lens,” Barthes writes, “everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of ‘posing.’ I instantaneously make another

body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image” (*Camera* 10). This sequence is historicized when he refers to an early device created to support the portrait-posing body: “this headrest was the pedestal of the statue I would become, the corset of my imaginary essence” (13). So whatever identity he claims as his own prior to being “observed” is instantly replaced by an other that is determined by an external gaze. He is, in effect, transformed into a subject by the “summons” of an other.

Ironically, the above passage from Barthes' *Camera Lucida* is strangely reminiscent of Descartes: the prominence of the first person singular pronoun, the preoccupation with personal self-knowledge in a scholarly text, the traditional parameters of which tend to preclude the incorporation of authorial history or anecdotes. Barthes diverges from Descartes, of course, at the point at which his “I” is compelled to seek self definition beyond reason, as contingent upon external factors that are in turn embodied in his own experience. But it is exactly the inclusion of this experience that brings the function of the gaze and, more specifically, Barthes' own identificatory process in front of the camera closer to the reader. In other words, the reader, like the 17th century reader of Descartes, is given an historical example by which to contextualize her or his own experience of otherness.

Where *Camera Lucida* challenges the self-evidence of the photograph's codification is in reference to a particular quality that some photographic images offer, such as that which Barthes encounters in the photograph of his mother that is so central to his project. His notion of the “punctum,” a photographic detail that provokes strong emotion in the viewer, indeed, that “wounds” the viewer with its poignancy, suggests that there is something essential, present or real about the subject of such an image. Thus he

is able to identify the “being” and “soul” in the image of his mother (75), “the necessarily real thing” (76) of her that corresponds to the generally “intractable” (77) nature of the Photograph (his capitalization). However, Barthes cannot make a clean leap into presence, for he must acknowledge the irony of the photograph which “[speaks] of the nothing to say” (93). “Alas,” he claims, “however hard I look, I discover nothing” (100). What is ultimately discoverable, he suggests, is the “air” of the photograph, “a kind of intractable supplement of identity” (107, 109). And even this speaks, once and for all, to his own personal subjectivity, his own affective space.

The tension inherent to *Camera Lucida*, between an experience of the real and the nothingness of the image, clearly presents a crisis of subjectivity and objectivity. But more than this, it indicates a practice of looking whereby one seeks that which will cause pain. In this respect, we may think of the “wound” inflicted by the photograph’s “punctum” in relation to the discomfort manifested by a theoretical engagement with the real, as that which is at once present and painfully inaccessible. In later chapters, I shall invite the current reader to consider practices that allow one the advantage of confronting the real *face à face*, film viewing constituting once such practice.

By virtue of its comparatively elaborate process of creation, the art of film automatically raises questions concerning not only its reception on the part of the viewer but the extent to which its production is informed by ideology as well. In her widely read “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Mulvey observes two prominent elements in the viewing experience: the scopophilic, in which the viewer receives pleasure from objectifying a screen personage, and the identifying, the viewer-ego’s misrecognition of the screen image-ego (ie., the heroic protagonist). The connection between Mulvey’s

identifying look and that look which orients itself in the mirrored reflection should be readily apparent. The scopophilic look, on the other hand, complicates identification with the screen image in two ways. First, it brings to bear upon the film itself the weight of patriarchal ideology in so far as the look that becomes attached to a female “object” is itself male. A hierarchy is thus set up (and reinforced) that positions the male viewer as active subject and the female image as passive object. Secondly, and by extension, Mulvey's notion of the scopophilic look grounds the ideological process of identification in the Freudian concept of the castration complex.^{xix} The result is an explication of the Lacanian subject that at once renders the spectatorial experience dynamic (and ominous) and colonizes that experience by constraining it (as it is played out in conventional cinema) to the limitations of a psychoanalytic category.

The difficulty that emerges here, of course (in addition to precluding difference), as in each of the “Society’s Being” theories discussed so far, is that the subject is theorized into a corner and allowed little or no access to a position beyond its discursive fabrication. The explication itself, then, becomes problematic to the extent that it posits a mere extension of mirror-stage identification. The Lacanian subject, in both its original conception and as it has been interpreted by Lacanian theorists such as Mulvey (and as rendered, we might recall, in the Althusserian scheme), is essentially colonized by the identificatory process and is thus relegated to a position (or rather, a category) of impotence. As Hilary Neroni has pointed out in relation to Mulvey, this approach is problematic in so far as

it [views] psychoanalysis as prescriptive rather than investigative. In this way, it [has] wrenched psychoanalysis out of its proper domain ... it [takes] psychoanalysis as a tool for outlining a feminist film practice rather than as a tool for discovering one already

implicit within filmic practice itself, a path that [encourages] experimentation and [allows] for flexibility (“Jane...” 210, 211).

Neroni’s critique serves as a link to the far more productive view of desire put forth by Deleuze and Guattari, as well as to a notion of filmic practice that, again, in terms set forth by Deleuze and Guattari, points to an imperative of experimentation without the constraints of restrictive, normative frameworks.

Nevertheless, Mulvey does explore the possibility (and the desirability) of a subversive cinema that would “make way for a total negation of the ease and plenitude of the narrative fiction film” (“Visual...” 423), a precursor to what Kaja Silverman calls a “new art.” She provides an example of such cinema in her consideration of David Lynch’s *Blue Velvet*, to which she devotes a chapter in her *Fetishism and Curiosity* (1996). Through its exploration of the unconscious and the uncanny (Freud’s notion of that which is at once homely and unsettlingly enigmatic), *Blue Velvet* ensures that “the hidden is brought to the surface to trace its persistence rather than its erasure” (153). In this case, “the hidden” refers to those aspects of American culture that are often “erased” in its popular mediatization. However, the general principle of Mulvey’s analysis, the exposure of sub-“text,” is indicative of a subversive agenda. This form of cinema disposes of traditional hierarchies and disrupts the common orientation of the gaze with the ultimate goal of establishing a “new language of desire” (153). Such is the ambition of Silverman, whose own use of psychoanalytic theory to redirect the lines of identification is the subject of chapter two.

Two | “New Art” and the Psychoanalytic Frame: Promises and Disappointments

In the first chapter of her *The Threshold of the Visible World*, Kaja Silverman relates a personal anecdote involving her weekly experience of walking amongst groups of homeless people, presumably on her way to university. The experience provokes a crisis for her in that she feels compelled, albeit sporadically, to help those less fortunate than herself and yet finds it necessary to restrict her compassion to monetary offerings. She cannot, she admits, look her interlocutor in the eye. “What I feel myself being asked to do,” she recounts, “and what I resist with every fiber of my being, is to locate myself within bodies that would, quite simply, be ruinous of my middle-class self – within bodies ... which can ... make a claim to what, within our culture, passes for ideality” (26). In other words, she resists the capacity of the other (as homeless, classless self) to negate her privileged, “ideal” class position. For she recognizes this ideality as being both dependent on the other (in so far as her “self” may be defined in contrast to

otherness) and repellent of the other in that he or she, in being an abject presence, is an affront to her life of privilege.

Silverman's inclusion of this story from her personal history accomplishes two things. First, it implicates her own subjectivity in the primary target of her project – the principle of self-sameness which refers to the inclination to either repudiate or subsume what is taken to be other (26). Secondly, the account helps to contextualize for the reader a confrontation with otherness that everyone faces on some level – be it gendered, racial, class-related or otherwise. It aids in removing this experience from a theoretical text and inserting it into the realm of everyday life, where scopophilic and identificatory processes work to construct subjectivity not simply in front of the mirror or in the movie theatre but on “Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley” (26).

Silverman's ultimate project in *The Threshold of the Visible World* is to redirect lines of identification so as to “uplift” and liberate the co-dependent relationship between self and other. In so doing, she calls into question Cartesian subjectivity (via psychoanalytic theories of identification) and re-circuits the lines towards a vision of self and other based on an appreciation (and the desirability) of difference. Consequently, I will argue, she lays the groundwork for an ethics of selfhood based not only in theory but, as the inclusion of her anecdote implies, in conscientious, productive action. In this chapter, I shall continue to contextualize postmodern subjectivity by considering Silverman's model of altruistic desire as a response to Mulvey's appeal to film-makers and, by extension, other artists in whose work lies the possibility of the subversion of conventional spectatorship. I will also examine Silverman's notion of praxis as one that calls for the production and the (spectatorial) utilization of art that challenges the notion

of normative ideality, the “normative” quality of which, in its naturalization, maintains a false sense of self in relation to privileged subject-positions in society.

Visual Pleasures and Painful Thresholds

For Lacan and Mulvey, “the world can be seen only on the other side of the mirror stage” (Silverman, *Threshold* 69). Indeed, the childhood mirror takes on a different context, a different frame that reflects the bodily ego, in Lacan’s words, as “the very framework of [the] categories of [our] apprehension of the world” (quoted, 69). So the ego, in this view, is a condition of the world beyond the mirror stage as well as a product of the mirror stage itself. But how do the two “entities,” the ego and the mirror, inform one another? What are the processes that dictate the substantiation of their mutual and interdependent existence? Here we must turn to Silverman for further inquiry into the two spectatorial agents of identification with which we are already familiar, the “look” and the “gaze.” To these shall be added a third, the “screen.”

Just as we saw in the work of Mulvey, the notion of subjectivity advanced in *The Threshold of the Visible World* is explicitly dependent upon conventional psychoanalytic categories. Once again, I will refrain from repeating the general structure of the Oedipal model, the castration complex and its concomitant desire except to comment on the means by which they necessitate, in Silverman's view, identification. Castration presupposes lack. The subject who perceives herself or himself as castrated *or in danger of castration* is the subject in fear of lack.^{xx} Whilst fear may be the emotional result of the suspected condition, what compels the subject to compensate for the threat is desire. Like Aristophanes’ bisected humans wandering about in search of their other halves, the

Freudian/Lacanian subject desires what she or he presumes to be (potentially) sundered from his or her person. In other words, the subject desires to be whole and will go to curious extremes to acquire what is believed to be his or her natural birthright in the face of all deleterious impulses to the contrary. Identification is therefore rooted, in the psychoanalytic model, in lack.

In defense of the aforementioned categories against exceptional familial circumstances that could invalidate the model's reliability, Silverman asserts that "the Oedipus complex and the castration crisis do not necessarily occur punctually within the family, but are induced as an effect of the larger culture" (*Threshold* 32). The implication here is that cultural practices reinforce not only the supposed debility of the subject but also the tactics whereby an illusory wholeness can be maintained "on the other side of the mirror stage." Silverman is thus alluding to the representations of ideality, of desire, that Mulvey condemns in her Lacanian reading of conventional cinema. In Lacanian terms, the subject's identification with the mirror image and, indeed, with the other as it is manifested in adult life, is the quintessential act of desire, the more or less unconscious strategy of the subject to preserve the self against the threat of lack.

Silverman distinguishes the three modes of identification in the following terms. The look, she defines simply as the "activity implied by the human eye" (*Threshold* 169). The look is the act of seeing without the connotation of subjective or cultural filtering, the act of objective vision, in so far as we may impute objectivity to sight as a bodily function. The gaze, on the other hand, is also a function of sight but one that exceeds the capacities of the individual body. Rather, the vision of the gaze proceeds from the

symbolic order and is locatable only in so far as the latter is a product of human (bodily) experience. To the extent that the symbolic order occupies an ethereal position in this experience, the subject is at once a conduit and an object of the gaze. Silverman describes the gaze as “the ‘unapprehensible’ agency through which we are socially ratified or negated as spectacle” (133). Lacan's eleventh seminar, from which she draws her definition, considers the gaze in relation to the camera (in the photographic act) and the experience of being photographed as a metaphor for the objectification of the subject (56).

It [the gaze] impresses itself upon us phenomenologically through that sense which we all have at moments of acute self-apprehension of being seen from a position outside ourselves.... That experience of specularization constitutes a necessary feature of identification; we can only effect a satisfactory captation when we not only see ourselves, but *feel ourselves being seen* in the shape of a particular image (57).

The “particular image,” of course, may hold little resemblance to what the look “objectively” envisions. What is important to understand about the experience of “being seen,” however, is that the envisioned subject is “commandeered” by the gaze to embody (an)other image.

To elaborate on the metaphor of gaze and camera, Silverman turns to Christian Metz who illustrates the nature of photography as “a cut inside the referent” (quoted, 149), the latter referring to the subject to whom meaning or signification may be ascribed. Metz is suggesting that the subject/object of the photograph is compelled to sacrifice an aspect of himself or herself in deference to the territorialization of otherness, as is Barthes when he recognizes the camera lens pointed in his direction. What this sacrifice amounts to is a figurative, if not a literal death. For the referent, Barthes maintains, is the “spectrum” of the photograph, a word that “retains, through its root, a relation to the

'spectacle' and adds to it that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead" (*Camera* 9). In other words, the centered or "cerned" subject, to use Paul Smith's neologism, dies in the wake of its fragmentation imposed by the camera. The photograph itself documents this fragmentation, this death, and thus alludes to the condition of physical mortality.

Between the look and the gaze lies a third term that acts (compulsively, conspiratorially) as a source of information through which vision is filtered. The screen is a mediating force that "mingles" with the symbolic order to dictate the quality of the "particular image." In Silverman's own words from her *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, the screen is "that culturally generated image or repertoire of images through which subjects are not only constituted but differentiated in relation to class, race, sexuality, age and nationality" (150). And to extend this definition to accommodate the project of her recent work, she goes on to define the screen "as the conduit through which social and historical variability is introduced not only into the relation of the gaze to the subject-as-spectacle, but also into that of the gaze to subject-as-look" (*Threshold* 135). The third term, then, "fashions" the image via its interplay with and manipulation of the identificatory process and does so according to culturally determined standards. By thus ascribing meaning and characterization to the image (and eliminating other qualities or interpretations in the process), the screen constructs the object of the image, namely, the subject.

Together, the three processes of identification accomplish two major feats. First, they work to materialize subjectivity. They provide a vehicle with which the subject can explore himself or herself within the context of a body in relation to other bodies.^{xxi} This

point may seem obvious but it lays the groundwork for the second accomplishment which is to (re)direct desire (the “original” desire to compensate lack) towards idealized images. As I demonstrated in chapter one, according to a person’s subject-position, he or she comes to be constituted by the desire to approximate an image of ideality, either by enveloping (or incorporating) otherness so as to maintain an illusion of self or by excoriating that which is uniquely personal and, perhaps, marginal. In both cases, the image, in collaboration with the screen, is a dictator that demands from its subjects the utmost regard. The representations that it enforces, like the “mirror” in the subjective mind, “do not so much reflect us as cast their reflection upon us” (*Threshold* 57). I allow the pronoun “us” to remain in the above quotation to emphasize the inclusivity of the screen despite variations in cultural history. Few individuals, especially in image-besieged Western cultures, are ever far from the allure of aspiring to ideality, an aspiration that is itself rooted, in psychoanalytic theory, to a primary *meconnaissance*. The subject who does succumb to such a compulsion, Silverman asserts, “can only passionately but passively reaffirm the specular status quo” (40) or the normative ideality that is fundamentally (an) other than (or to) the subject’s experience.^{xxii}

The social and material power of identification lies in the dominant and thus normative representation of the screen that informs the identificatory act. The process that allows the screen to effect its function, however, occurs predominantly in the unconscious. It is for this reason that Silverman claims that the possibility of transforming identification cannot be met in accordance with immediate “conscious edict” (37). Rather, the subject must be prompted by external agencies that work to provoke an awareness of unconscious activity. Such transformation would not occur, it

must be noted, at the absolute cost of identification, which is itself necessary for human development, and much less at the expense of the fundamental lack inherent to the human condition. What transformation would achieve, on the contrary, would be a re-evaluation of identification in terms of illuminating the spurious ideology that operates as a primary instigator for the act. In other words, ideology as a colonizing effect of the unconscious would be consciously recognized and consequently, de-naturalized by virtue of its extraneous nature. This evaluation can occur only after the fact in Silverman's model, a point to which I will soon take exception. Nevertheless, the illumination is enough, she hopes, to ultimately raise the act of identification to a higher level where the "specular status quo," the normative ideality that confers distinct (and disparate) values upon various subject-positions, is actively employed rather than passively consumed.

"The Backwards Glance"

As a product of unconscious activity, identification is accessible, according to Silverman, only from the position of looking back in time at a specific instance. The crowning moment of Silverman's strategy for gaining some degree of control over this predicament, then, lies in a moment of conscious *retro*-activity, in the insight gained from hindsight. Quite simply, she calls for a "redistribution at the site of the screen" (*Threshold* 41). What this entails is a reconsideration or a "remembrance" of self-perception, one's perception of the other and, most importantly, how and why one perceives in two mutually exclusive ways. A comparison to Barthes' "mythologist" who apprehends the manipulation enacted upon an entity is appropriate here.^{xxiii} In both cases, the observing subject acquires agency through retroactive discernment (the third-level

“mythology” in the Barthesian model) or idealization (the “productive look” of the Silvermanian subject). However, the *meconnaissance* experienced in identification, as noted above, runs much deeper than the victimization of ideological imposturing. Indeed, I would argue that misrecognition is bled into the fabric of the human condition, thus rendering a “redistribution” after the fact as limited to an uncertain future of discernment as opposed to a present or immediate recognition of identification. Nevertheless, a number of features of Silverman’s project may be elucidated in order to demonstrate the value (limited though it may be in its after-effect) and the ultimate provision of the “backwards glance.”

To begin with, the Lacanian notion of the “given-to-be-seen” (*le donne-a-voir*), the assertion of normative representation upon/within a given image, finds its antagonist in Silverman’s “identity-at-a-distance,” a means of approaching the other that is conducive to productive looking. By situating the subject in relation to the other in such a way that distance is honored rather than used as an excuse to consume or to be consumed, normative representation or the “dominant fiction” is depleted of its power. “At a distance” the subject thereby experiences sublimation (in the Lacanian rather than in the Freudian sense of the term)^{xxiv} in which ideality is “conferred” upon an object, as opposed to being merely found (*Threshold* 74). Ideality is presented or bestowed in a reciprocal exchange between subject and object, leaving otherness to remain other and the self to come to terms with its own “borders” and, quite possibly, its ultimate lack. Such a look is productive in so far as it shuns negation and embraces diversity. This look

attempts, first of all, to apprehend the otherness of both the gaze and the constitutive image by foregrounding (rather than disavowing) those signifiers through which they sometimes mark their presence within the field of vision. This eye also scrutinizes those forms of *meconnaissance* to which it is most prone, and seeks to re-articulate the terms of

the self/image, or self/other relationship.... [The subject] attempts ... the objectivity of the *moi*, and to recognize him or herself precisely within the others to whom he or she would otherwise respond with revulsion and avoidance (170).

So the “distance” between subject and object is clearly not meant to imply physical proximity, any more than the “borders” of the subject can be said to be static. On the contrary, the self and the other (as, in this sense, human other) come to recognize their interdependence, not for the sake of upholding self-sameness, but in terms of what I will call, for lack of a better phrase, their common humanity.

Hence, the “active gift of love.” For Silverman, the conferral of love upon another sheds negative identificatory practices (activated in the movie theatre, during a sidewalk stroll amidst others, etc.) of their potency. She takes literally the biblical admonishment to “love thy neighbor as thy self,” for, in so doing, one aids in the collapse of the prejudice that constructs the margins – the marginality of race, gender, sexual orientation, etc. Desire, which in Freudian terms is associated primarily with the instinctive life and self-satisfaction, is here interpreted with a nobler aim. In the words of Lacan, the “active gift of love” is directed “towards the being of the loved subject, towards his particularity” (quoted, 73). Thus, the other is allowed to be the subject that he or she is in actuality, with the lack, historicism and individuality that such a subjectivity implies.

However, the question remains as to the nature of the external agencies that serve to awaken the subject to the possibility of “seeing” with different eyes. As a practice, an extension of theory, psychoanalysis obviously positions this awakening in the context of language and the transformation of signifying paradigms within the analysand’s psychic machinery. We might take as a current example the work of Roy Schafer, whose

Retelling a Life defines the self as “a set of narrative strategies or storylines each person follows in trying to develop an emotionally coherent account of his or her life among people” (34). The practice of analysis, then, is undertaken to re-organize one’s collection of self-narratives (via association, disclosure, transference, etc.) for the purpose of generating a relatively agentic narrative (or narratives) that is, we might say, “closer than breathing.” “In this account,” Schafer continues, “there is no self that does anything. Instead, there is one person telling stories about single selves, multiple selves, fragments of selves, and selves of different sorts, including *deceiving* and *deceived* selves” (51). The collection of “narratives” that constitutes the subject is multiplicitous, the “one person” either “following” or “telling” stories out of a paradoxical, self-inscribed selflessness. “The unconscious is structured like a language.”

Likewise, Silverman maintains that external agencies whose prerogative it may be to advance the subject can exist only in the form of “textual assistance,” by which she means the artistic mediums of painting, photography and film.^{xxv} Of course, she is not referring to *any* example of art but to a “new” form that assists the subject in achieving a moment of conscious apprehension of the workings of the screen, a moment that she designates as “nachtraglichkeit,” or “deferred action” (*Threshold* 103) because of its emergence after the fact. I shall now briefly consider an example of such art from Silverman's own analysis, Hans Holbein's portrait *The Ambassadors*, surprisingly Lynchian in its defamiliarization of subject-positions, before moving on to an initial example of my own, Nathalie Sarraute's, *You Don't Love Yourself*, that most succinctly characterizes the art-as-praxis for which Silverman and Mulvey are calling, albeit in the form of a novel.

Historically, *The Ambassadors* is in actuality quite remote from postmodernity. Dated at 1553, it depicts two aristocratic gentlemen posing amidst various cultural artifacts, representations of the high culture of their time. The symmetry of the *mise-en-scene* compels the viewer to observe the painting from the position of front and center. And yet, at bottom center, one notices a highly distorted object that comes into focus only when the viewer steps to the extreme right of the portrait. It is a human skull. Drawing once again on Lacan, Silverman holds that the Holbein piece exemplifies a number of departures from the traditional “text.” First, it displaces the point of viewership by suggesting that “the geometral point (the center) is only one site from which to apprehend an image – or, by extension, the cultural screen, and that the screen can appear very differently depending on where one stands” (178). In other words, the painting (indirectly) posits a *difference* of seeing akin to Nietzsche’s notion of perspectivism or, more recently, reader-response theory.

Secondly, and most importantly, the painting undercuts the values inherent to the “dominant fiction” presented to the geometral perspective. “The upper portion of *The Ambassadors* shows more than Holbein’s ‘world.’ It also shows us our own. In addition to earthly accomplishment, the painting validates ‘masculinity,’ ‘whiteness,’ ‘monarchy’ and ‘God,’ and it places all of these terms in a close metaphoric relation with one another” (178). The skull, however, when perceived from any given point but especially from that which renders it legible, calls the dominant values into question. One is reminded of Barthes’ admonition that photography connotes a “flat death” (*Camera* 92), the mortality of both the ideologically “centered” and the physical self. Here, of course, the death sign is overt. Thus, the viewer is less inclined to identify according to the

dictates of the screen. Instead, he or she becomes suspicious of an identification that is anything but natural.

If Silverman's task is to transform normative standards of identification by re-visioning the self and the other, *The Ambassadors* aids in this process by de-centering a privileged class, thereby revealing the unstable nature of the self/other dichotomy in relation to social status.^{xxvi} Nathalie Sarraute's *You Don't Love Yourself* differs from the Holbein painting, as well as from the other works of Silverman's analysis (the *Untitled Film Stills* of Cindy Sherman; Isaac Julien's film *Looking for Langston*, for example), in that it de-centers the subject irrespective of sexual, racial or class distinction. Whilst various subject-positions emerge ("he;" "she;" persons of notoriety, etc.), the novel's main concern, rather, is the fundamental experience of observing the multiplicity of human nature. I turn here to Sarraute for two reasons. First, the novel is a compelling example of postmodernist art in the service of exploding the Cartesian individual and is thus aligned with Silverman's project of unveiling the subject. In this respect it is closely aligned with Julia Kristeva's notion, based on her reading of Bataille, of postmodern "writing-as-experience-of limits" ("Postmodernism?" 200) that will figure prominently in chapter three. Secondly, *You Don't Love Yourself*, by virtue of its more general scope, is a text that comes closer to approximating the literal fragmentation of the subject found in the alternative models that I will present in the later chapters – closer, that is, than Silverman's examples, which tend to "speak" to certain subject-positions in a "new language of desire" that is specific to those subject-positions.^{xxvii} Moreover, the novel, like those that occupy chapter three, shall prove to be a useful segue into the final chapters of this analysis in so far as its own methodology and conclusions both present

important problems and offer insight into the possibility of reaching beyond theory and into a praxis of agency.

Nathalie Sarraute's Self Love

Fragmentation begins with the very structure of *You Don't Love Yourself* (1990), a novel that appears late in Sarraute's career but is nevertheless indicative of the Nouveau Roman tradition with which she is commonly associated alongside such figures as Alain Robbe-Grillet and Marguerite Duras. Consisting of a dialogue in constant flux between the various "I's" of a single persona – "the procession of the delegates" (Sarraute 115), the novel illustrates a disjunctive rather than a cohesive subject or collection of subjects. As such, it is aligned with Ann Jefferson's claim that "the whole aim of Sarraute's work could be seen to be to chart all the possible ways in which the amorphousness of subjectivity can lead the subject to fall prey to other subjects, and to record the full variety of pressures that erode the boundaries separating self from other" (*Nathalie* 46). Chapter one sets the scene for such erosion, the condition of subjectivity that governs the protagonist's exchanges with others and his/her consequent self-reflection. Faced with the charge, "you don't love yourself," the subject is compelled to question the nature of the "you" to whom the statement refers:

Me? Only me? Not all the rest of you who are me? ... and there are so many of us ... 'a complex personality' ... like every other ... who is supposed to love whom, then, in all this? But they told you: 'you don't love yourself.' You ... the one who showed yourself to them, the one who volunteered, you wanted to be the one on duty ... you broke away from us, you put yourself forward as our sole representative ... you said 'I' ... (1-2).

The conflict, then, arises not only with the subject's self-realization as a multiplicitous being but is manifested in the necessity to *appear* as a singular, static

entity in the social arena, to pronounce the nebulous “I” in response to an interlocutor. Such a situation is conflictual in that the protagonist is aware of his/her nature and thus the profound irony of maintaining a social relation between “two” people. The conflict is furthered by the fact that the other tends not to possess the same self-understanding. Rather, he or she, like the Cartesian “I,” lives under the delusion of individuality and is therefore capable of the grand claim that “I love myself.”

Intending to explore the phenomenon of self-love and its connotations of misrecognition, the subject goes in search of an “individual.” This he/she finds in the example of a man at a table who is narcissistically enraptured by his hand. “... So much love in his gaze ... that’s the way it is with people who love themselves ... their love goes first to everything they can see that belongs to them ... their hands, their feet, their forearms ... and then their reflection in the mirror ...” (14). Sarraute’s “individual” thus recalls the Lacanian subject whose gaze travels from the limbs to the mirrored reflection where the “jubilant assumption of his specular image” (Lacan, *Ecrits 2*) gives rise to a fateful (mis)identification. When the subject addresses the conflict directly, in conversation with another such “individual,” the response is one of shock and anxiety. “I’m not really the right person,” the other maintains, “you know, that kind of loss of the feeling of myself ... or that proliferation ... I don’t know ... these are questions ... you ought to discuss with someone more competent.... In short, a total fiasco” (Sarraute, *You* 10-11). Again, in keeping with the Lacanian model, the individual, in an attempt to establish a singular conception of himself, is inclined to create something out of “nothing.”

And yet, Sarraute does not fail to implicate the subject with the individual (the self and the other), for such a failure would constitute the isolation of the subject as a “whole” of sorts, as distinguishable from the other. On the contrary, she illustrates the flux of “I’s” as a process that is in part dependent upon external circumstances. Recounting a discussion that has taken place between the subject and numerous others, she writes of a particular “delegate, the one who, in the presence of any group of people, begins to resemble them. They rub off on him ... He immediately allows himself ‘to be cut from the same pattern’” (104-5). So the conflation of self and other, as put forth in psychoanalytic theory, for example, is treated here as the cause of a kind schizophrenia in the subject whereby he or she attempts to emulate an other so as to conform to the ‘same pattern’ or, in psychoanalytic terms, normative ideality. The predicament of subjectivity, then, in which each character in *You Don't Love Yourself* is ultimately subsumed, is both reflexive and self-perpetuating in the social body in so far as that “body” is constituted by an infinite number of bodies that are themselves fragmented by the act of (unconscious) “delegation.”

Nevertheless, the fact remains that the subject/protagonist of the novel does *not* misrecognize himself/herself. When confronted with an other whose perception of the subject locates the latter in the space of a singular identity, the subject rebels and states that “it’s a prison we can escape from” (116). There is freedom in overcoming the temptation to dissolve into the other, freedom in multiplicity. It is a faculty that obliges the reader, by presenting common human exchanges, to reflect upon the multiplicity of his or her own nature in response to those exchanges. In this respect, the novel is

effective in its provocation of the reader to recognize the possibility of emancipation from the illusion of a cohesive self.

However, Sarraute calls into question the quality of the freedom, in a particularly postmodern turn, when she characterizes the state of fragmentation as an “infirmity” (9). The subject who has been made conscious of his or her plight is thus sentenced to an ongoing discourse between the “delegates,” a “procession” that leads, by the author’s own admission, to illness. To illustrate and to document this illness, as Sarraute and her contemporaries in various fields have attempted to do, is, of course, the postmodern imperative. But to stop short of pronouncing a body-centered “cure” in place of the “I” is, in my estimation, simply to reaffirm that “I,” debilitated though it may be, in the garb of a fashionable epoch. Sarraute’s protagonist is thus the quintessential postmodern subject – painfully aware of his or her fragmentation (as well as that of others who, privy to their condition or not, suffer the same debilitation) and yet exultant in this condition to the point of conceding to the didacticism (a matter of morality, as we soon discover) of exposing this delusion of wholeness to others.

In the concluding chapters of the novel, the protagonist encounters another whose self-love (the ultimate mark, for Sarraute, of delusion) surpasses that of others. He is described as “genius in the art of self-love” (207) and consequently viewed by those whom his love attracts as a “supernatural man” (184). In an effort to dispel the myth of grandeur surrounding this man, the protagonist locates one of his followers who seems most susceptible to suggestion and attempts to “lure him over to something precise, concrete and not too important, on which we can easily pin him down... “ (213). The protagonist intends to reveal the truth of the leader’s self-love and thus the illusion of

wholeness to which he and his followers have become vulnerable. But “to spread the truth, to liberate” (217) is a costly endeavor in so far as it causes the follower to suffer the potential loss of his convictions. It is a liberation that the protagonist feels he/she must risk, however, “even if we hurt him,” for the self-love of the leader has “got hold of the whole world” (217).

So Sarraute’s protagonist faces a moral imperative. He/she must expose the delusion of an essential “I” that can claim to love itself despite the inevitable infliction of pain, an “I” whose impact is construed to be universal. Such is, I have argued, the imperative of postmodern theory, a surgery that typically re-fashions the “I” as a splintered topography with little apparent regard for the material consequences of such “liberation.” The morality of this postmodern imperative is thus limited to the fulfillment of its own teleological designs. Sarraute’s protagonist, for example, fails to offer a “cure” for the “infirmity” because the liberation is considered to be a “cure” in and of itself.

The notion of an ethics of selfhood in this model, then, extends no further than the imperative to emancipate the subject from a false sense of self-unity. *You Don’t Love Yourself* clearly succeeds in delineating the subjective condition which must be apprehended before such emancipation can take place and consequently fulfills at least half of the requirements of the subversive art crucial to Silverman’s project. The second half, as I have already discussed, involves the provocation of an “active giving of love” whereby the knowledge of one’s subjective predicament prompts an eventual embracing of the other without objectifying that other. The degree to which this project succeeds or fails in broadening the parameters of theory, in extending the ethics of the postmodern

project to include an active re-negotiation of the self/other dichotomy, shall occupy the remainder of this chapter.

“The Backwards Glance:” 2

Thus far, I have provided a background to the elucidation of subjectivity as it is conceptualized in postmodern theory. I have allowed this part of my trajectory to culminate with the work of Silverman for the reason that *The Threshold of the Visible World* takes what I perceive to be a tremendous step towards bridging critical theory (particularly the psychoanalytic strain) with what I refer to above as an ethics of selfhood. In my estimation, a critical exploration of the means by which subjectivity may be countered or, rather, supplemented by a proposal that both provokes the discomfort of the real and suggests embodied (as opposed to merely theoretical) practices of agency, is long overdue. It seems a natural transition – from the destruction of a model to its reconstruction, with the hope of its being improved in the process. Silverman begins this transition and is in part successful by virtue of her concern with more than just “models.” She is interested in the liberation of the historically marginalized “other,” and thus, the non-marginalized “self” from the imposing constraints of the gaze. Doubtless, this interest arises from a concern with the ethics that is intended to serve the human being, the lived self in his or her material reality.

And yet, as psychoanalytic theory has demonstrated, reality is by no means limited to tangible materiality. Human suffering arises from emotional as well as from physical hunger, from psychological turmoil as from physical brutality or neglect, from complex processes of identification as from objectification in the name of ideology. So

an ethics of the self, if it is to conceive and implement a program of agency, must by necessity be loyal to the human experience in its entirety. To do so is to complete the transition from annihilation to reformation and, regardless of success or failure, to begin a process upon which others may build.

Of course, there must first exist the desire for such reformation. As should be apparent from the work of many of the theorists discussed in this analysis, little room is made for the possibility of liberation from the psychological and cultural restraints placed upon (and embodied by) the subject in the postmodern articulation of indeterminacy.^{xxviii} What is lacking in this program, along with an ethics of restoration, is the historicized subject.^{xxix} By this I mean not only the subject as marked by a given subject-position (black, white, male, female, gay, academic, blue-collar, etc.) but the subject as quite literally embodied, the corporeal “someone.”^{xxx} Richard Shusterman asserts that most of the work on subjectivity and embodiment “concerns what they call ‘writing the cultural body’ (that is, describing how the body functions as a symbol or theme in literature or how its conception has been shaped through history) rather than treating real bodies as they actually function in practice and examining how their performing and experience could be improved” (*Performance* 155). It is, of course, easy to see how neglect of the embodied self can lead to the disinclination to seek a progressive and exceptional degree of agency for the subject. After all, as long as the latter is safe within the boundaries of theory, why bother prescribing a “cure” for its “ailment” (at least, of course, until the time comes that such a prescription is warranted by the entrance of a new phase of theorization)? But the fact remains that the subject and the living self are not so very

distant from one another and thus the depletion of the former has consequences for the living being. If this were not the case, theory would be a useless enterprise indeed.

In his characterization of orthodox Marxism, Paul Smith maintains that it “holds to the view of the individual subject which installs [the subject] as an abstraction, fit only to be assigned a class and thence to be superseded by the processes of history” (*Discerning* 4). History, in this sense, has no reference point in the self. Rather, history is to be understood as the constant amassing of ideological forces that work to shape the world. And given that the subject “is the constitutive category of all ideology” and that “ideology [itself] has no history” (Althusser, “Ideology...” 244), such a Marxist stance does not bode well for the living self. Hence, the capacity of this theory to confront mere “abstractions,” as pure functions of the world, as opposed to people. As such, the subject is allowed no possibility of agency; for how can an “abstraction” resist its interpellation? At best, the subject as depicted in the traditional Marxist scheme, in the work of Althusser, for example, is drawn as the “structural dope of ... stunning mediocrity” (quoted, Smith 17), the resourceless victim of ideology. But such a capacity to seize upon a limiting view of the subject is by no means confined to Marxism. Indeed, the assignation of a certain characterization to the subject, as we have seen, may take a variety of forms other than class – the subject as medium of power, as extension of Other, harbourer of desire, as object of an imperiling gaze.

Silverman's own *modus operandi* is open to a number of problems despite its contribution to a movement towards a more ethical or compelling theorization. In so far as it is an attempt to do what others have not (namely, to offer a springboard from which the material subject may commence a resistance to his or her interpellation), however,

and, at the same time, represents this “movement,” the “artillery” of which tends to be psychoanalytically-oriented, I would like to put forth *The Threshold of the Visible World* as an example of both the potentiality and the shortcomings of postmodern theory as the latter (slowly) develops a sense of its own material responsibilities.

Before Silverman can begin to theorize the subject and the subject’s potential capacity for resistance, she must first establish the parameters of her theoretical foundation. In this case, obviously, the foundation is in psychoanalytic theory. She states that “it is my contention that if [the productive look] is to have any theoretical validity, it must emerge *inside* rather than *outside* the discursive space of psychoanalysis” (*Threshold* 164). This particular “discursive space,” however, like all theoretical foundations, requires certain admissions, some of which may be more viable (or “productive”) than others. For example, when Silverman claims that “the dominant fiction’s most rudimentary binary opposition is that distinguishing masculinity from femininity; its most fundamental equation ... that of penis and phallus; and its most central signifier ..., the family” (quoted, *Threshold* 178), she is acceding to psychoanalytic categories that cannot be taken as givens. The “dominant fiction” may indeed function partly as a manipulation of impulses based on desire originating in primary acts of identification with the other. But to reduce the formation of subjectivity to a phallic equation and the “classical theatre” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 24) of the family is, to my thinking, limiting both with respect to the extent to which the subject is essentially fragmented as well as to the prospects of its active resistance.^{xxxix}

When considered in light of Sarraute’s individualistic and gender-neutral subject, for example, subjectivity emerges as a condition of fragmentation that exceeds the

boundaries (psychoanalytic or otherwise) of social structure. Indeed, the psychoanalytic notion of otherness (through which the subject is characterized) is itself made problematic by its further reduction in *You Don't Love Yourself* to a seemingly unlimited procession of "selves" that constitutes subjectivity, "selves" whose origin lies in the immediacy of non-gender-specific, human thought, emotion and sensation. As the basis for both Silverman's and Mulvey's analyses, then, Lacan's ordination of the phallus to the height of subject-circumscription is highly questionable. In terms of the limitation imposed by conventional psychoanalytic categories upon active resistance, it should be clear that such resistance cannot come to fruition until the self, in its multiplicity, is "known." Anatomical absence (or potential absence), I would argue, is only part of the larger demarcation of the subject.

The use of critical theory in an attempt to challenge normative standards of ideality and representation brings to light another problem, regardless of theoretical affiliations. If Silverman is asking us to re-educate our "look" in a way that privileges the diversity of both the self and the other, who, exactly, is being addressed in this appeal? Who is "us?" My guess is that it is not the homeless person about whom she shares a personal anecdote or the woman of color who cannot afford to attend a university. "Us" clearly refers to the (still) predominately white, middle to upper-class, heterosexual reader of a theory-based text such as *The Threshold of the Visible World*. Perhaps this is an obvious reality, one that impinges upon any project of self-development. But it has serious implications when the opposition of self and other is submitted to a program in which theory, and more importantly, theory through art, is heralded as a valid means by which the opposition may be "raised to a higher level."

Annette Kuhn's *Women's Pictures* pre-dates the Silverman text by fourteen years but sets up a similar project. Presumably drawing from Mulvey, Kuhn deconstructs traditional Hollywood cinema and, in its stead, proposes a feminist-oriented cinema that would subvert the dominant scopic regime. In a statement that references her work as a medium of resistance but is applicable, I would argue, to most any project that is dependent upon art or the theoretical text by which it is inspired, Paul Smith asserts that “both the analyses of dominant cinema and the readings of counter-cinema are predicated upon the notion that subjectivity is more or less purely and simply the effect of textual practice: a new textual practice ... will constitute a new subjectivity” (*Discerning* 35). This is a key assertion that clearly resonates in *The Threshold of the Visible World*, the notion not only that “language provides the very definition of man,” but that texts can transform him or her. The texts that Silverman proposes as examples of a “new,” subversive textual practice certainly serve her purposes, though a question may arise as to their accessibility given the reach to which her project aspires. Is it really viable to suppose that these texts will be read by all or even a small numbers of viewers with a working knowledge of Lacan so as to instigate a new subjectivity?^{xxxii} Perhaps the texts that she proposes are more a reflection of her own cultivated tastes than they are of a capacity to change life on Telegraph Avenue, much less the world. I will address a similar issue with regard to the texts and practices at the center of this study later.

Nonetheless, even if the viewer does attain to a “new subjectivity,” and even if this subjectivity resists being incorporated into normative standards of idealization, the question remains as to the degree to which the “new look” is transformative of the self/other opposition *as well as* the very condition of the “infirmity.” Moreover, how

effective can this transformation be if it occurs only after the fact of re-evaluating the gaze, as Silverman concedes? The answer to the first question depends on the particular problem we are addressing. For the problem of the opposition of self/other is, on one level, distinct from the “infirmity” that Sarraute illustrates in her novel. The dichotomy is vulnerable to modification to the extent that the cultural context that in large part determines the relation between self and other is in constant motion and may therefore be susceptible to the subversive impact of an artistic medium, be it a radical or a popular manifestation. The condition of being, at any given moment, “one of [many] ... possible personifications [or] ... virtualities” (Sarraute, *You 2*), on the other hand, would seem to require a more transgressive and perhaps more personal self-confrontation. Regardless of this distinction, however, each problem is quite obviously dependent upon the other. For if the (culturally-based) constituents of the self/other dyad are equally (though, to lesser or greater degrees self-consciously) determined by the “infirmity” of fragmentation, a “new subjectivity” cannot be maintained without addressing both the subject and her or his phenomenal and psychical environment, ie., the subject’s relations to everything that is “other.”

As for the second question, I will turn once more to Smith, who believes that “it might be useful to talk of the process itself by which subjectivity is formed *instantaneously*, and of the mechanisms by which interpellations either succeed or fail in constructing for themselves a ‘subject’” (37). Ironically, perhaps, we as theorists and cultural critics find it relatively easy to accept the notion of an “instantaneous” interpellation, whilst one’s immediate awareness of this more or less subtle process is precluded for fear of ascribing too much humanist insight to the subject. But this seems a

rather unfortunate limitation. For in so far as the (mature) subject is interpellated in an instant, in a moment of *meconnaissance*, that instant of identification, I will soon argue, is indeed immediately observable beyond the restricted access offered by a “backwards glance.” The depth and quality of such observation, of course, is contingent upon the willingness to step outside a theoretical paradigm by “locating” oneself in the “moment” of bodily consciousness, the nebulous, though nonetheless pivotal “presence” of which shall occupy the various textual practices considered in the remaining chapters of this analysis.

Three | Reading the Monsters

If the postmodern imperative is to make a jubilant claim for the de-centered self and, consequently, the de-centeredness of all that issues from the self, the more general philosophical imperative may be the simple but broad admonition to “lebt wohl” (“live well”), as Richard Shusterman puts it. Obviously, the two preoccupations are at odds in as much as postmodern theory tends to identify, and to a large degree corroborate, what Sarraute deems the “infirmity” of the postmodern subject.^{xxxiii} However, the subtle transition from a psychoanalytic mode to an ethics of selfhood that builds upon an original recognition (and concession) of fragmentation appears inevitable. The transition is well underway, of course, with its roots in the various rights movements of the 1960s and 70s that have since adapted to the particular strain of the “postmodern turn” by (theoretically, at least) unhinging and conflating the synthetic boundaries of selfhood and marginality. But the transition is far from complete, I would argue, when the self-knowledge of the subject is limited to simulacra, to engagement with a “punctum” that

calls out from the image, or indeed, the self-image, in imaginary and affective self-construction. The subject in history, as a “moment” in what Don DeLillo might call body-time, with/in a body in constant negotiation with “delegates,” is evaded when the image of lack becomes the defining (and final) word on selfhood. The reconstitution of the subject, then, requires a fuller understanding of the condition of subjectivity that unfolds not only in theories of absence and lack but in practices of presence, the immediacy of which need not have anything to do with metaphysics. What such presence does imply is a radicalization of embodied experience.

Philosopher and aesthetician Richard Shusterman, in his *Practicing Philosophy*, asserts the utility of a body-oriented praxis within the context of typically textual theoretical practices. He observes that

if philosophy takes for its pragmatist goal not the grounding of knowledge but the production of better lived experience, then it need not be confined to the realm of discursive truth and the language-games of their justification. Philosophy can aim more directly at the practical end of improving experience by advocating and embodying practices which achieve this. And if the practice of linguistic intervention provides one such tool, why can't the practice of somatic disciplines focusing on non-discursive experience provide a complementary other (173)?

In this and following chapters, I will discuss several such “tools” that one may employ for the purpose of *observing*, as closely as possible, the condition of subjectivity as it is defined by postmodern theory, and of *acting* on this observation with the goal of reconfiguring the parameters of lived experience. In other words, I am interested in systems of thought and practice that recognize, along with the theories outlined in the preceding chapters, the illusion of the static, coherent subject but offer “somatic disciplines” as counter-practices for the productive abolition of this illusion. By

productive I mean to suggest an embodied extension, rather than a mere negation, of “Modernity’s Man,” to use Archer’s category.

Shusterman suggests the name “somaesthetics” for the general category of practices that contribute to the “quest for self-knowledge and self-creation, for beauty, potency, and pleasure, for the reconstruction of immediate experience into improved living” (177). This is not, however, to imply a program on par with the popular conception of self-help or New Age. Rather, “somaesthetics” aims to ground the subject in the body, through disciplined, organized explorations of corporeal experience. Some extreme examples, as Shusterman notes, include the public masturbation practices of Diogenes the Cynic or Foucault's relatively private participation in S/M in the latter part of his life – extreme enough, I suspect, to rid the category of any banal connotations (177). But the dramatic and perhaps scandalous nature of these practices is unnecessary to the fulfillment of the embodied philosophical life. Whilst productive transgression is hardly foreign to the present study, I tend to agree with Shusterman in his promotion of gentler practices that lessen the impact of egocentricity; the work of F. Matthias Alexander, for example, whose Alexander Technique teaches the practitioner to become more aware of routine bodily functions, “to extend ‘conscious control’ over bodily actions formerly abandoned to unconscious habit by focusing heightened awareness on previously unnoticed and unattended somatic experience” (168). In addition, he sites body-oriented therapies such as “Rolfing, Bioenergetics, Eutony, Feldenkrais method” (175) and even the Walden experiment of Henry David Thoreau as potential sources for the reclamation of the body from “unconscious habit.”^{xxxiv}

Of course, the application of a therapy, at least as it is exemplified in the practices foregrounded by Shusterman, generally revolves more around a process of healing than an initial and challenging deconstruction that may be necessary prior to the implementation of “treatment.” To advocate a practice that endeavors to enhance the mind/body connection without due regard for the fundamental conflict between all that is (perceptually) “self” and “other” (by which I mean the thoughts, emotions and sensations that constitute psychic experience in addition to the human other) would be to stop short of the argument that postmodern conceptions of subjectivity are necessary to the reformation of the subject. One way to bridge the gap between Shusterman’s predilection for therapy and “Society’s Being,” Archer’s category of social construction, is to explore the more conventionally aesthetic component of a “somaesthetics,” a text-based aesthetics that treats the traditionally objectified text – the novel, the film, the music composition – as embodied praxis, as a means of segueing into a consideration of practices in which the body is more overtly central.

Deleuzian Becoming

In her study of Deleuze and film theory, Patricia Pisters posits a significant distinction between a Deleuzian and a Lacanian approach to the question of how we engage with filmic images. Whilst the latter model inevitably situates the viewer as possessor/victim of the Gaze, for Deleuze,

there is [in the cinematic experience] only an attempt to reason and to establish adequate relations that could improve life and increase the power to act. The subject’s desire is not based on negativity and lack (and hence not based on sexual difference and castration), but it is a positive desire to make connections. The image is not seen as a representation, an umbilical cord, but as a thought-provoking encounter (*The Matrix* 21).

This observation is made in the context of discussing Hitchcock's great corpus of film that lends itself to making such "connections," though I would suggest that Deleuze's notion of positive desire is relevant to any engagement with art, particularly certain manifestations of art, be they visual or otherwise. For Deleuze and Guattari, like Spinoza, desire does not originate in lack, but from an impulse towards joy and "becoming," a trajectory that "constitutes a zone of proximity and indiscernability, a no-man's land, a non-localizable relation sweeping up the two distant or contiguous points, carrying one into the proximity of the other" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 179). In other words, the desiring subject is a process in this view, but one that is not always already delimited by a "localizable" and definitive relation to the other. Rather, one is capable of moving in the direction of a new feeling, seeing and experiencing of oneself alongside, in provisional conjunction with, that which is other.^{xxxv}

I will discuss how such movement can play out in aesthetic experience in a moment; first I shall continue to develop some key concepts in the work of Deleuze and Guattari, namely, "becoming" and the "Body without Organs (BwO)," that point to the usefulness and the radical nature of a "somaesthetics." Rather than simply propose definitions, however, it is necessary to qualify the *functions* of these terms. For the designation of "concept" or "notion" notwithstanding, the act of becoming (to which the BwO is intimately linked) is first and foremost just that, an action on the part of the embodied subject that prompts a becoming-other, something new, an action that constitutes "a practice, a set of practices" (*Thousand* 150), as Deleuze and Guattari put it. In the process of a productive becoming, one may be transformed in so far as one is

“deterritorialized” or freed, however temporarily, of the colonization of some external force, the potential form(s) of which I have already outlined in chapter one.

Althusser’s illustration of the “hail,” for example, depicts a “moment” in which the becoming can take one of at least two possible turns: either the interpellation on the part of the authority figure is successful, the pronouncement “hey, you there!” thus inscribing itself into a given subjectivity, a becoming-subject, or the someone can resist the hailing by contacting those nodes within the self that speak to and act out of multiplicity. One is not, or does not have to be, according to Deleuze and Guattari, the mere effect of discourse (or an actor in the family romance of Oedipus, for that matter). Rather, one desires to be an open territory, happy, relatively free of ideological pressures and homogenizing constraints. Becoming, then, can be an acting upon that which is innate to the immeasurable network of those self-defining “moments” that compose the individual, a germination of inherent potentialities.

As Pisters explains, creating a BwO does not necessarily imply disembowelment. A BwO confers “desire, a process of a body that does not want to depend on the functions and places that the organs traditionally have” (*Matrix* 68). Here again, we encounter desire as a productive, transgressive experience of oneself in which traditional bodily functions (sex, for example, or the 180 degree turn to face an interlocuter) give way to more immanent pleasures and intensities. One becomes a BwO to the extent that one’s body “challenges or resists fixed identities” (110). Of course, such resistance can take shape according to a broad spectrum of experience that does not preclude cognitive activity. Indeed, the latter contributes, ideally, to a constructive rather than a destructive becoming in so far as one keeps

enough (small) rations of subjectivity to respond to dominant reality. Because dominant categories in reality probably will never disappear, it is important to confront those categories and to deal with them; but processes of becoming happen in that same reality: they slip through and in-between the categories. It is therefore important to consider construction of the subject both on the molar level of strata (identities, segments, and categories) and the molecular level of becomings (the ‘breaking’ or ‘opening up’ of the subject) (111).

Another way of saying this is that transformation of the self does not preclude cultural or social experience. Becoming a BwO does not eradicate interpellative activity; rather, it exposes and quarantines it so that the becoming self can pursue the orientation that is its strongest instinct or intuition in the face of external counter forces.

The example from *A Thousand Plateaus* of a BwO that most closely relates to my own project is the masochist. An explication of productive masochism will figure prominently in my discussion of practices that foreground the body as the primary site of development in chapter five. First, however, I wish to consider more traditionally discursive texts that provide a space in which to activate healthy (as opposed to what Deleuze and Guattari designate as unhealthy – becoming-addict, for example)^{xxxvi} deterritorializations and becoming(s). Limited to the constraints of discourse though they may be, such texts are nevertheless indicative of Barthes’ notion of the writerly text, that which constitutes “*ourselves writing*, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages” (*S/Z* 5). The term is used in opposition to the readerly text that forecloses on meaning, thereby removing the reader from his or her own responsibility in the formulation of meaning(s). Doubtless, Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* is an example of the former. For any engagement with its many

strands or “lines” provokes a process in and of itself, a process that, like any becoming, is not without risk or uncertainty. “So experiment,” we are told (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 251).

“Becoming-Imperceptible”

With the increasing speed and specular ostentation of contemporary Western culture, a penchant for a particularly minimalist obscurity has inevitably come to inform certain modes of aesthetic practice, at least since the period typically identified as modernity in North America and Europe. Be it in the form of a painting by Mark Rothko or Kasimir Malevich, a specific period of silence inaugurated by John Cage or a film by Alexander Sokurov, minimalism is increasingly a style, a physical and psychic space into which artists retreat. Whether they emerge from such space unchanged or transformed, unencumbered by the trappings of mass culture, or at all, is invariably a matter of philosophical and political investigation. Whatever its original impetus or outcome, the move towards a “minimalist” subjectivity is equally germane to literary production, to authors as well as characters. Here I would like to suggest that the reader may also share this space in which the art/text-producing self seeks solace and, in some cases, “becomes” on a trajectory of radical, “minimal” otherness. Such is the potentiality of reading in so far as it may constitute a “somaesthetic” practice of self-analysis that hinges in part on the reading subject’s desire to be more (or rather, less) than the “society of the spectacle” allows in its ongoing interpellative operations.

Anna Powell, in her *Deleuze and Horror Film*, claims that becoming, as both theorized and enacted by Deleuze, “is not concerned with identification or formal

relations, but with the dynamic movement of life between and through congruent singularities” (67). It is not, she continues, “driven by end-gain” (67). Obviously, the congruence shared by certain phenomena suggests a quality of immanence, though it is also clear that there is no absolute state towards which these phenomena are moving. There is, however, a particular becoming that Deleuze designates as somehow final. He suggests that in relation to the aim of writing, “well beyond a becoming-woman, a becoming-black, -animal, etc., beyond a becoming-minoritarian, there is the final enterprise of becoming-imperceptible” (*Dialogues* 45). It is an unusual statement, one that could be read to herald a humanist subject whose subject-position is ultimately, and hierarchically, second to a condition of impersonal ontology, or the lack thereof. In my reading, Deleuze is presenting precisely this, a sense of what one may become, and continue to become, when relatively bereft of borders, those that ensnare us in regions of social construction. And yet, his is a disappearing self whose disappearance, not to mention his or her humanism, is by no means static. For “becoming-imperceptible is a process of elimination whereby one divests oneself of all coded identity and engages the abstract lines of organic life, the immanent, virtual lines of continuous variation that play through the discursive regimes of signs and non-discursive machinic assemblages alike” (Bogue, *Deleuze's* 73). Such becoming is doubtless a practice that works upon subjectivity and its cultural contexts with what Deleuze might call a kind of warfare.^{xxxvii} In the “process of elimination,” something is obviously lost, a segment of identity, though in this divestment, I would argue, the space of obscurity is opened to reveal an “enterprise” of selfhood that carries one “beyond” rigid designations and default becomings. Something is gained as well.

In so far as “becoming-imperceptible” unfolds in time, the nature and quality of movement from one (visible “singularity”) to the “other” (obscurity) determines that of the “final enterprise.” To refer once again to a by now traditional minimalism, it is often dependent upon a form of repetition or an attention to microscopic details of the quotidian that unfolds over a duration whose length is not necessarily extended beyond what is comfortable for the average reader/viewer/listener. In literary terms, one might think of Nicholson Baker’s *The Mezzanine: A Novel*, which utilizes dense, descriptive language in a relatively brief number of pages (but many footnotes) to scrutinize an individual psychology as it operates in mundane situations. Like the music that generally carries the flag of minimalism, however,^{xxxviii} such language is far from “silent.” In other words, gaps into which the reader may read his or her own meaning or experience are rarely forthcoming in this repetition/regime of signs, thus inhibiting the reader’s entrance or participation in the novel as a catalyst for becoming beyond an acknowledgement of identification with the quotidian.

An obvious foil to what I would call a blanket-effect minimalism lies in Samuel Beckett’s oeuvre of fiction, drama and literary theory. When he argues that “the experience of my reader shall be between the phrases, in the silence, communicated by the intervals, not the terms, of the statement” (*Disjecta* 49), he is doing more than positing a new minimalist theory of fiction; he is also implicating the reader in his or her own experience or practice of reading and, by extension, “becoming-imperceptible” in congruence with the “silence.” “To bore one hole after another in it [language], until what lurks behind it – be it something or nothing – begins to seep through; I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today,” he claims (171). We might think of “what

lurks behind,” like a Zen paradox, as both “something” and “nothing” – one thing and another thing, perceptibility and imperceptibility. I will return to Beckett in a moment. What is crucial to understand about his methodology is that it more or less informs, both thematically and conceptually, the literary examples that follow, namely Jean-Philippe Toussaint’s *The Bathroom*, Julio Cortazar’s “Blow-Up” and Don DeLillo’s *The Body Artist*. The specific time of each novel, I will argue, compels, if not necessitates, a shedding of oneself as a reading subject, beyond which may lie, as Deleuze proposes, something new.

As for the writer, he or she,

like each of us, begins with the multiplicities that have invented him or her as a formed subject, in an actualized world, with an organic body, in a given political order, having learned a certain language. But at its highest point, writing, as an activity, follows the abstract movement of a line of flight that extracts or produces differential elements from these multiplicities of lived experience and makes them function as variables on an immanent ‘plane of composition....’ The task of the writer is to establish nonpreexistent relations between these variables in order to make them function together in a singular and nonhomogenous whole, and thus to participate in the construction of ‘new possibilities of life....’ (Deleuze, *Essays*, Introduction lii).

The life to which Daniel W. Smith refers here, I would argue, refers as much to an “organic” reader as to a writer and the characters he or she invents, as “formed subjects.” The “new possibilities of life” can include (but are not limited to) a consolidation of one’s “delegates” into a becoming -“plane of composition,” the latter being indicative of creative effort in general as well as of the particular practice of writing. “New possibilities” of lived, agentic, “somaesthetic” experience. Indeed, the above passage from the introduction to Deleuze’s final book encapsulates, to a great extent, the trajectory of my own primary argument – from acknowledgement of subjective

multiplicity to embodied action on behalf of potential becomings, action that generates links between “variables” of bodies and practices.

The problem of metaphor aside^{xxxix}, writing “at its highest point” suggests that such “new possibilities” depend upon a “plane of composition” that is more advanced than others. Rather than ascribe value judgments to texts, we might take “highest” to imply a literary model that is minor as opposed to major, marginal as opposed to dominant. What Deleuze and Guattari promote in their extolling of a “minor literature” such as that of Kafka is “a subtraction and variation of ... language achieved by stretching tensors through it, ... a determination different from that of the constant, ... a subsystem or outsystem” (*Thousand* 105). A “minor literature,” then, “individuates” (“Postmodernism?” 200), as Kristeva puts it, and in so far as it supplants psychosis, or indeed, the “constant” of everyday subjectivity, it stands in opposition to dominant fictions and engages limits, both in and out of literature. This is eccentric literature that repudiates homogeneity, of style and content, that is “minoritarian as a potential, creative and created, becoming” (*Thousand* 106).

The 19th century saw the advent of the “*fou littéraire*,” Charles Nordier’s term for the eccentric writer. Peter Shulman, in his study of eccentrics in modern French literature, references Nordier in order to contextualize the development of the relatively flamboyant sensibility of the “*fou littéraire*” into its reserved, modern equivalent. Whereas the former distinguishes himself or herself (be he or she *auteur* or *personnage*) from the masses by sartorial or behavioral extravagance, the modern eccentric is “invisible,” a solitary individual who seeks solace, from speed, unnecessary chatter and hyper-mechanization, in the mundane spaces of the private and the quotidian. Moreover,

though typically victimized by the existential, geographic and temporal conditions of modern existence, the 20th century eccentric is often redeemed by his or her comparatively naturalistic, if not primal, anomalous preoccupations. Indeed, Shulman's metaphor of choice, borrowed from Warren Motte, is the "clinamen," from the latin construction *clinamen atomorum*, meaning "swerve of atoms" (*Sunday* 47), indicating the occasional anomalous trajectory of a single atom away from what is otherwise linear, uniform movement.

Taking his examples from writers and filmmakers such as Toussaint, Jean Echenoz and Jacques Tati, Shulman explains that "the fictional eccentric is like a marker in life or, in Riffaterrean terms, an ungrammaticality, that brings the reader's attention to what is important yet never properly heralded..." (131). What is important in this paradigm of non-conformity is precisely the quotidian, the everyday that Michel de Certeau characterizes as "charged with the miraculous, the froth of it as astonishing as that of writers and artists" (my translation, *La culture* 244-45). And yet, in so far as a given narrative functions as a counterpoint to relatively conventional fictions, those dominant modes of experience against which one becomes, from which one is de-territorialized, an initial *expulsion* of what is profoundly *unimportant* from the everyday is critical. For the everyday, as de Certeau suggests, is not the sole province of conventional artists; it is, rather, the map of everyman's collective and individual trajectories, his or her subjectivity, the agency of which periodically hinges upon a movement away from uniformity. As a "marker" on this map for everyman reading, the eccentric character in the dissident, writerly narrative calmly (and thus provocatively) explores interior terrains, experiments with himself or herself in dubious and often

alienating contexts. The reader's "attention" thus engaged, his or her own "line of flight," from the break with normative fictions to becoming in the everyday of a grounding literary practice, may be written upon a BwO in the simple, and experimental, act of reading. The following are thus examples of becoming-eccentricity in embodied, narrative practice.

Samuel Beckett's Absent Love

We need only refer to one of Beckett's titles, *Not I*, to demonstrate the extent to which his general subject is thrust into a mode of self-effacement. As a means of segueing into a discussion of *The Bathroom*, however, it is useful to consider another of Beckett's texts, a twenty-one page "novella" entitled *First Love* (1977), as a means of plotting some of the textual "holes" that litter the former, along with the other works under consideration. Like each of the protagonists that I will consider here, that of *First Love* is immediately obscure, an anonymous figure whose relation to the everyday is at once central to his experience and the means by which he is alienated from himself and others. Moreover, by virtue of this distance between self and other, his eccentricity is inclined to assume a "monstrous" face as he negotiates his paradoxical desire to both "love" and retreat from sociality (and perhaps, from himself).

What distinguishes this protagonist from others, however, is the degree to which his monstrosity remains negative and unproductive. A man of twenty-five whose father has died, who equates this death, along with his own, with his "first love" – a prostitute by the name of Lulu (or Anna, as he decides to call her), whom he meets on a park bench, settles with in her two room apartment and eventually, though unwittingly, impregnates,

only to leave her the very moment she gives birth – such is the Beckettian protagonist whose jaded approach to death in life takes him ever closer to literal extinguishment. From the opening paragraph he claims to “associate, rightly or wrongly, [his] marriage with the death of [his] father, in time. That other links exist, on other levels, between these two affairs, is not impossible” (*Four* 9). Such links are not impossible, though he fails to explore them. He prefers instead to meditate (in a “time” that serves only to level him, to flatten his becoming) on his own demise, of which his discourse (the story is told in first-person) is an extension, as illustrated in a celebration of his preemptive epitaph:

My other writings are no sooner dry than they revolt me, but my epitaph still meets with my approval. There is little chance unfortunately of its ever being reared above the skull that conceived it, unless the State takes up the matter. But to be unearthed, I must first be found, and I greatly fear those gentleman will have as much trouble finding me dead as alive (10).

Later references to his “corpse” indicate a fascination with thanatos that will inform his disassociation from his “lover” and consequent abandonment. Indeed, his eccentricity quickly develops into malevolence when he considers “kicking her in the cunt” (15) for stroking his ankle.

Beckett’s example of “becoming-imperceptible,” then, however amusing and indicative of a “divestment of identity,” is not without its irresolvable conflict. The other, from whom virtually no protagonist can escape (in as much as one is always already implicated in the social, desire, ideology, as a “visible” self), serves in this case as an impetus for confinement, aggression and, ultimately, stasis, as opposed to productive insight into a mutually productive obscurity. His becoming is thus limited to a singularity that remains singular, a banal death drive. The protagonist philosophizes:

What mattered to me in my dispeopled kingdom, that in regard to which the disposition of my carcass was the merest and most futile of accidents, was supineness in the mind, the dulling of the self and of that residue of execrable frippery known as the non-self and even the world, for short (15).

What “lurks behind” the “holes” of increasing invisibility and disjointed discourse is, of course, much closer to “nothing” than “something,” the protagonist’s ironic movement towards immobility, and thus death, indicative of a negative rather than a positive “silence.” This is as close as scholar Paul Foster can get to a productive alignment of *Beckett and Zen* in his book by this title. The fourth Noble Truth of Buddhism (the first three being: all life is suffering; suffering is caused by desire and ignorance; and the fact that suffering can be escaped), which suggests a particular way out of suffering via the Eightfold Buddhist path, he claims in his analysis, “will be mentioned only occasionally as a point of reference” (29). A text such as *First Love*, though useful in its interrogation of imperceptibility, leans more heavily on the shoulders of the first Noble Truth than on any notion of how one might transcend the inevitability of suffering.

Jean-Philippe Toussaint’s Lavatory

Death is by no means foreign to the protagonist and first person narrator of *The Bathroom* (1990), a short novel divided into numbered paragraphs that follows in the tradition of the Nouveau Roman and, as the back cover of the English edition suggests, the films of Jim Jarmusch. Another young, anonymous man in his late twenties, having moved into his bathroom (in Paris), eventually leaves his lover and makes his way out to another bathroom (in a hotel in Venice), where he suffers from sinusitis. Upon examining an x-ray of his skull, he observes his eye sockets, “immensely white, anxious,

gaping” (81). Immobility comes with a price. In this case, however, the lack of movement and confident selfhood do not necessarily amount to a “nothing” behind the text’s economy of discourse that Warren Motte characterizes as an “epic of the trivial” (*Small* 72). In his employment of a minimalist aesthetic of reduction, of “stage,” “action” and “narrative,” as Motte observes (73), Toussaint presents a figure whose stasis is nevertheless a trajectory, the minute details of which coalesce in the person of a relatively benign nature.^{x1} And in keeping with this course of (in)action, the reader, too, may come to explore a space of slowness, contemplation and ironic cultural critique alongside the presence of death as an amusing and inevitable companion, a metaphor for obscurity, rather than a condition towards which to strive.

Again, from the opening page the reader is alerted to the awkward situation into which he or she will become immersed, an absurdist retreat from the world, a self-effacement of comic proportions. “When I began to spend my afternoons in the bathroom I had no intention of moving into it” (*Bathroom* 3), the protagonist claims. The fetishization of solitude continues throughout his travels. When his lover, a woman by the name of Edmondsson, ventures to Italy to be with him (and ultimately to escort him back home), he is inclined to rebuff her gaze upon him during their meals: “...I wanted to go back up to my room, isolate myself. I didn’t want to feel any more gazes upon me. I didn’t want to be seen at all anymore” (71). His self-effacement has reached its breaking point in relation to the other; this, despite his appreciation of the particular other that is Edmondsson, apparent from her daily phone calls he eagerly awaits prior to her visit. It is a point that escalates, in truly Beckettian fashion, when she asks him to stop playing darts back in the hotel room, at which point he launches a dart that hits her in the

forehead and “sticks.” Other, less dramatic (as dramatic as anything can be in Toussaint’s world...) moments occur to suggest a distant cynicism or ludic existentialism as the guiding sensibility of Toussaint’s monstrous eccentric – terse comments to bourgeois others, an ill-fated relation with a precocious child, etc.

And yet, this brand of “monstrousness,” from his self-imposed obscuration to the aggression that fuels certain of his acts, ultimately, I would argue, constitutes a move in the direction of a productive divestment of self. The fragmentation of his meager existence – the competing desires, the ongoing negotiation between private and social space – is, in the end, reminiscent of the Mondrian paintings he finds so “reassuring” (67-68), the abstract blocks of solid color forming a symmetry, that which his life lacks, and eventually resembles, as opposed to a chaotic void of meaninglessness, or worse, complete stasis. And there is indeed an end to his story, conditional though it may be upon circularity (he eventually returns home to the reserved but accepting embrace of Edmondsson and decides to move out of the bathroom) and a “becoming-imperceptible” that finally brings the protagonist to a potentially renewed relationship with life on the margins of his solipsism. In the end, he appears, at the very minimum, prepared to accept the gaze of the other as a marker of his perceptibility in imperceptibility, his somethingness in nothingness.

In so far as *The Bathroom* scrutinizes the quotidian, utilizing, in brief, jerky sentences, observations of everyday items and spaces, it orients the reader’s attention towards details that might otherwise be missed in the whirlwind of daily preoccupations. In so doing, the novel presents a particular mode of reading that is clearly writerly rather than readerly; in other words, it allows the reader to participate in the making of meaning,

as a process, rather than being submitted to the closed universe of a textual object. In reference to this process, Motte observes that “the poverty and banality of the narrator’s experience encourage the reader of *La Salle de Bain* to consider that artifact as textuality, as *écriture* (rather than as representation of the larger world), and to reflect in a sustained manner on the reading experience” (*Small* 80). Even that moment that we might identify as a climax, the dart entering Edmondsson’s forehead, is presented as relatively benign – “She fell to her knees on the floor. I walked over to her and pulled the dart out (I was shaking). It’s nothing, I said, just a scratch” (71) – leaving the reader without the anchor of conventional (discursive) drama that might impede perception of the everyday. What remains, of course, here and in other texts under consideration in this study, is a monstrous violence that exceeds the neutrality of its presentation. I shall address this problem in the following chapter.

One of the primary issues at stake in any aesthetic experience, along with space, is time – its duration, its quality, the degree to which its passing may be refined in conjunction with an aesthetic phenomenon. I make the argument above that *The Bathroom* is circular in its narrative trajectory, though this is merely one way of characterizing the narrator’s, and thus the reader’s, “action.” Indeed, inherent to a process of “becoming-imperceptible,” as evidenced by the texts under consideration here, is an extended focus on immediate experience, regardless of the other “singularity” to which this experience may be joined. Obviously, such focus stands in contrast to the common fixation/obsession with a broader, and perhaps entirely fictional preoccupation with time past and future whereby the subject is inevitably made “visible” through dramatic identification with such preoccupation. Motte suggests that “Toussaint does

away with obvious segmentation and causality, he subverts the notions of beginning and ending, he casts the time of his story as a series of ‘nows’” (*Small* 77). The most obvious example of this subversion is in section 14 of Part One of the novel, consisting of a single word – “now” (*Bathroom* 9). Fragmented and neurotic though they may be, these “nows” contain at least the seed of a productive becoming in so far as they propel the protagonist towards mobility; the time of his patchy subjectivity a reflection of the reader’s own more or less unconscious investment in the “now” of *The Bathroom* and its signal of flight.

Julio Cortazar’s Picture

In his autobiographical *Around the Day in Eighty Worlds*, Julio Cortazar explains that “since I write out of an interstice I always invite others to discover one of their own and to see for themselves the garden where the trees bear fruits that turn out the precious stones. The monster remains in charge” (17). Here we have a writer’s strategy that parallels Deleuzian becoming. An action is undertaken amidst cultural, normative fictions or “monsters,” one that nevertheless manages to generate “moments” of beauty and transgression that “slip through and in-between the categories,” interstices carved into social cement. Cortazar’s short story “Blow-Up” (1967) is an example of such a writing practice that, like *You Don’t Love Yourself*, disrupts expectations of conventional narrative, authorship and identity and thus calls into question the nature of the writing/reading self.

Cortazar’s story is told by photographer Roberto Michel who, wandering the streets of Paris on a bright Sunday morning, encounters a boy and what appears to be an

older woman, perhaps his mother, a thought that eventually succumbs to the realization that she is more likely a prostitute, try as he may to envision her in a more romantic or maternal light. He observes them and concludes that a third party, a man waiting expectantly in a nearby car, has a role in what Michel finally determines to be a set-up for a robbery. A photograph he takes of this scene, however, impinges upon the event as it might otherwise have unfolded; the boy runs off and the woman demands the roll of film. Michel's return home finds him obsessing over a blow-up of the print, his obsession transforming it into a moving image in which the (third) man comes devouringly alive.

As with the dense and often obscure discourse of *A Thousand Plateaus*, or the disjunctive narrative of Sarraute's novel, Cortazar's story defies a brief summary like the one above in so far as it must be encountered as a process of being read if it is to be understood or, to be more specific, employed. For Michel is no more a singular narrator (at least at the beginning) than the narrative bespeaks a singular, transparent event. We know this from the opening paragraph:

It'll never be known how this has to be told, in the first person or in the second, using the third person plural or continually inventing modes that will serve for nothing. If one might say: I will see the moon rose, or: we hurt me at the back of my eyes, and especially: you the blond woman was the clouds that race before my your his our yours their faces. What the hell (114).

The confusion here extends as well to time and space as the narrator interweaves his "current" observations of clouds and pigeons with the telling/typing of the story at hand, despite the fact that "nobody really knows who it is telling it" (116), the narrator thus obscured in the "holes" of his discursive identity. Even the present, to which Michel makes explicit reference, is undone when he claims that "right now (what a dumb word, *now*, what a dumb lie) I was able to sit quietly on the railing overlooking the river..."

(118). Of course, what makes the “now” dumb (an imposter, a “phantasy,” as Deleuze and Guattari might say) I would argue, is its colonization by the past and the future, a notion to which I will return later.

Nevertheless, there is little to grasp in “Blow-Up,” unlike the more traditional narrative that offers the reader easy identifications, points of familiarity that might contribute to a relatively truncated, and accurate, depiction of the story and its possible meaning, the material of blurbs and easy synopses. And yet, as Dennis Turner has noted in his article on the relation between Cortazar’s story and the films that it spawned (Michelangelo Antonioni’s *Blow-Up* [1966] and Francis Ford Coppola’s *The Conversation* [1974]), unlike the films that present a more or less solid protagonist whose subjectivity slowly unravels, “Blow-Up” “reads in the opposite direction, beginning with a protagonist unable to locate a speaking position – and thus a self – and moving him to a position of integrated subjectivity, albeit a fantastical one” (“Subject” 17). Indeed, by the end of the story, there is no confusion as to who is speaking/writing (or, for that matter, reading); Michel, though still amidst the “clouds” and the passing birds, has identified himself as both the teller and the viewer (of the blow-up “film”) and must come to terms with his own role as voyeur. Though stricken by conscience (and quite possibly because of his conscience), he is integrated relative to his position earlier in the narrative, an integration that is clearly indicative of a process (comprised of various exploratory and not necessarily “dumb” “nows”) rather than an authorial (or authoritative) injunction.

The productive process that Michel undergoes is apparent not only in its movement towards the singular first-person pronoun, but in his inclination to embrace a less fragmented reality. At one point he characterizes his observation of the scene

between the woman and the boy as a suspicious “look” that always “oozes with mendacity, because it’s that which expels us furthest outside ourselves” (Cortazar 119). He goes on to suggest that “perhaps it suffices to choose between looking and the reality [the “real?”] looked at, to strip things of all their unnecessary clothing” (119). Clearly, he is aware of the tendency to “see” through a cultural and personal filter, and the imperative, which becomes particularly pronounced by the story’s conclusion, to “look” with probity. Michel even goes so far as to admit that he is “guilty of making literature, of indulging in fabricated unrealities. Nothing pleases him more than to imagine exceptions to the rule, individuals outside the species, not-always-repugnant monsters” (124). In addition to the characters in the “film” of his blow-up who provoke the imperative, he, too, functions as an “individual outside the species” in so far as his identity, his selfhood, is precarious. Such is his, and our, plight until a brush with conscience inspires the integration of various “selves,” an ethic that locates beauty amidst monstrosity. I will return to the notion of integrated subjectivity more concretely in relation to the Gurdjieff work in chapter seven.

Don DeLillo’s Performance

The “not-always-repugnant monster” of “Blow-Up” finds a parallel in Don DeLillo’s slender novel *The Body Artist* (2001), the story of performance artist Lauren Hartke, whose filmmaker husband, Rey Robles, has committed suicide, and the enigmatic man/boy, Mr. Tuttle, who comes to occupy the space of their home in Rey’s absence. With an unerringly precise economy of language, DeLillo confronts the specter of death and its impact on the conception and experience of oneself in time, in the wake of

devastating loss. Lauren's is "a kind of time that [has] no narrative quality" (DeLillo, *Body* 65); hence the prevailing quality of this economy is its use of incomplete sentences and generally disjointed language that follows a similar course to the work of Sarraute and Cortazar. This is especially apparent in the opening chapter in which Lauren and Rey experience a routine morning together prior to his death. Again we find fragmented discourse, behavior and identity as the (at this point nameless) husband and wife speak to one another without hearing, occupying their own solipsistic worlds to remind us of Eliot's "A Game of Chess" in "The Wasteland," the monologic utterances of anonymous subjects. It is in the context of such a relation and its collapse through death that the little monster, Mr. Tuttle, is born and inserted into Lauren's experience of time and consciousness.

Despite what DeLillo offers as the character development of Lauren and Rey beyond the opening chapter, anonymity remains a central theme in the form of Mr. Tuttle, Lauren's name for the amorphous figure who appears in his underwear, sitting placidly on a bed. The fact that Lauren accepts his presence without alarm is indicative of Mr. Tuttle's dubiously fictive nature, his role as the offspring of her trauma. As is clear just after Rey's death and before the discovery of Mr. Tuttle, "things she saw seemed doubtful – not doubtful but ever changing, plunged into metamorphosis, something that is also something else, but what, and what" (36). The "what" that is her new companion is monstrous to the extent that he himself is ever changing, mimicking to perfection the fragmented voices and gestures of Lauren and Rey in a manner that is realistically impossible. The monstrosity that Lauren sees, of course, is not as crucial to her own transformation as is her heightened perception of the inevitability of change, in

time, the question of “what” foisted upon her by grief and its manifestation as the timeless uncanny.

Recalling Beckett’s play with time in relation to the slender divide between life and death, as well as Michel’s skepticism towards time in “Blow-Up,” DeLillo’s critique of the “now” works to expiate Mr. Tuttle’s peculiarity in Lauren’s estimation: “He didn’t know how to measure himself to what we call the Now. What is that anyway? It’s possible there’s no such thing for those who do not take it as a matter of faith” (66). Clearly, Mr. Tuttle takes very little, if anything, as a matter of faith. This distrust of time unfolds throughout *The Body Artist*, beginning with the first line, “time *seems* to pass” (my italics, 7), and continuing as Lauren grows increasingly discombobulated with her marathon sessions of watching a live webcam in Kotka, Finland and her failed attempts to understand Mr. Tuttle, someone (now) who is also someone else (who is not now). Though DeLillo explores time as a concept in and of itself, I would argue that his exploration serves the relatively immediate purpose of providing a medium through which Lauren can transcend her grief and, perhaps more importantly, her de-centered selfhood.

In other words, fragmented time in the narrative of *The Body Artist*, time bereft of borders, functions as a catalyst for Lauren’s, and perhaps the reader’s, becoming in a series of problematic but ultimately productive “nows.” As critic Peter Boxall explains, “It is one of the working contradictions of DeLillo’s most recent prose ... that this evacuation of the moment [conventional time/chronology], this entry into the suspended non-time of post-historical mourning, is also a delivery into the very fibrous material of the moment itself” (*Don DeLillo* 217). And further, he suggests that “dwelling in the

moment involves, always, an estrangement from the moment” (218). Such “non-time” is a distinct quality of the “now” of the various texts under consideration in this study, though it is especially obvious in the DeLillo novel. What is estranged, I would argue, is not the “living” body/self of the protagonist and reader but an artificial self (what Gurdjieff, among others, identifies as “personality”) that tends to engage with artificial time or *Chronos*, as opposed to *Aeon*. The latter is “a time like that of an infinitude, ‘to swim,’ ‘to sleep,’ a becoming that is unfixed and non-pulsed, unfolding in no specifiable direction and in relation to no clear coordinates” (Bogue, “Violence” 97). Lauren’s time has no narrative precisely because she/it is in process of becoming a BwO.

If Mr. Tuttle is a monster, a BwO *par excellence*, he is by no means a representative of what I referred to in relation to “Blow-Up” as the dominant fiction. On the contrary, in so far as he is a product of Lauren’s unconscious and desire for stability, he is a constructive monster who stands as an example of what the future might hold if she remains open to the possibility of a new becoming. And she does remain open, particularly as the monster fades from her daily life and she assumes his place, uses his voice on the telephone, adopts his capacity for transformation. It is at this point that she realizes that “something is happening. It has happened. It will happen. This is what she believed. There is a story, a flow of consciousness and possibility. The future comes into being” (DeLillo, *Body* 98). Even before taking on the monstrosity of Mr. Tuttle, Lauren responds to his cryptic statement, “alone by the sea” (48), by contemplating its relevance to her environmental and ontological predicament. She considers “the house, the sea-planet outside it, and how the word *alone* refer[s] to her and to the house and how the word *sea* reinforce[s] the idea of solitude but suggest[s] a vigorous release as well, a

means of escape from the book-walled limits of the self” (48). There is, perhaps, an Emersonian investment in the redemptive quality of nature here, though Lauren’s “release” will ultimately be psychological and, in keeping with her profession, embodied.

Lauren becomes-monster by cultivating an ability to confront death and thus to resist the banality of her domestic life (even in the wake of death), its time-bound, language-constrained distance from the Real. This monster is performed in a body-art piece entitled “Body Time” in which she displays herself, her uncommonly flexible body, towards the end of the novel, the two “texts” mirroring each other to the extent that each presents monstrous bodies in transition, in time. In a review written by her college friend, Mariella, the author claims that “Hartke clearly wanted her audience to feel time go by, viscerally, even painfully. This is what happened, causing walkouts among the less committed. They missed the best stuff” (104). “The best stuff,” I would suggest, refers not simply to a particular action in the performance, but to an experience of the piece as a whole, the “visceral” quality of its duration. Likewise, by the novel’s conclusion, it is clear that Lauren has committed to a process of physical and psychical renewal and has opened herself to current and future becomings. When she enters the bedroom where she first encounters Mr. Tuttle, she is recognizably alone. “She threw the window open. She didn’t know why she did this. Then she knew. She wanted to feel the sea tang on her face and the flow of time in her body, to tell her who she was” (124). Through sensational, embodied experience, she has crossed a threshold of self-knowledge, into a liminal space where time, nature and monstrosity collide to form a BwO, a body, that is, that knows itself.

Lauren's body art piece and the grieving process that more or less fuels it allow her, as critic David Cowart puts it, to come "alive in time" (*Don* 208). As in the conclusion of DeLillo's *White Noise*, in which a "haunted mood" prevails in the wake of "people taken to the edge" (326), "Body Time" is not without consequences for Lauren; in order to invest the "time" of her art with significance (well) beyond the commonality of her personal suffering, her own body is altered "*in extremis*," as Mariella explains in her review. She continues, describing Lauren post-performance "as colorless, bloodless and ageless. She is rawboned and slightly blue-eyed. Her hair looks terroristic. It is not trimmed but chopped and the natural chestnut luster is ash white now, with faint pink traces" (DeLillo, *Body* 103). And yet, here DeLillo does not conclude with a "moment" of *jouissance*, of mere postmodern revelry in the abject body. Rather, he positions his protagonist in relation to nature and a productive experience of time so that her "wasted" embodiment serves the process of psychological development and transformation. This is not to return to a Cartesian duality of mind and body, for, on the contrary, each "mode" is instrumental to the advancement of Lauren's well-being and, by extension, integrated into her selfhood via aesthetic practice. Through her utilization of traumatic life circumstances in art, she is rejuvenated, albeit in a body/self that is by no means static.

With a nod towards certain historical manifestations of body art, DeLillo alludes to a number of performers who have defined the medium since the 1960's, including Chris Burden, Shigeko Kubota, Marina Abramovic and Ulay and Bob Flanagan. With the possible exception of Kubota's "Vagina Painting," the specific performances that are referenced here all have an aggressive, if not overtly violent edge. In contrast, Lauren's "Body Time" "is not self-strutting or self-lacerating. She is acting, always in the process

of becoming another or exploring some root identity” (105). As a way of examining the distinction between a productive “becoming” performance and one that is more indicative of “self-strutting,” I would like to digress by offering my own examples of body art pieces that are not included in DeLillo’s catalogue. My intention here is twofold: first I am interested in contextualizing “Body Time” in “Real” life (as does DeLillo to a small degree), as a viable “somaesthetic” practice, a “new art” (despite the historicity of its canonical figures). Secondly, it is necessary to explore the notion of performance in so far as I am situating the cultivation of agency within the framework of embodied artistic practice. Obviously, some “performances” (I use the term as loosely as possible) may be more effective than others as tools for self-transformation, a distinction I will explore in more detail with regards to film and theatre.

Performing Art

As a development of the radical politics and the general re-assessment of tradition that blossomed in the 1960's and 70's, body art has emerged as an arena in which the artist may utilize (and, in many cases, sacrifice) her or his body with the intention of re-interpreting subjectivity in relation to the other. The other, in this sense, may refer to the variety of demarcations of otherness spelled out in this analysis (a history of body art reveals that many such artists are versed in theory) as well as the audience that attends a given performance. As such, body art can create the condition for the provocation of subjective parameters in the form of *immediate, somatic* experience. As art historian Amelia Jones puts it, “by opening the embodied artist/subject to the other, body art also opens the embodied other (as interpretive self) to the artist; each projects onto the other –

each taking its place there as subject while simultaneously authorizing the other as subject” (*Body* 106). The assignation of a “place” (commonly de-centered from an illusionary coherence) harkens to the by now standard operation of “authorizing” contingency without theorizing beyond this contingency.

But what distinguishes body art as a potentially transformational practice is its occurrence in a moment that coincides with “the ‘subject’ as ... a moment in a lived life” (Smith, *Discerning* 37). In other words, the performance piece is an historical, corporeal event in time shared by various subjectivities in which consciousness (of self/body/other) can be triggered in the “moment.” It is an event that is more in keeping with the existential phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty “which understands the consciousness always in relation to its others and the world” as opposed to the decidedly modernist transcendental phenomenology of Husserl “who attempts to return consciousness to a transcendent ego” (Jones, *Body* 255, fn. 59).

However, the line that separates the two phenomenologies, by virtue of its contextualization in artistic practice, is necessarily fine and complicated. The work of Vito Acconci, for example, often positions him as an artist/subject whose identity through erotic desire (and by extension, his subjectivity) is dependent on an other either as a direct participant in the performance or as the presence of an audience. In his *Seedbed* (1972), Acconci lies under the floor of a gallery and, perhaps in homage to the public display of Diogenes, masturbates in response to the presence of the audience above who can, in turn, hear his performance through a speaker. It is clear that not only does Acconci subvert the positions of his own subjectivity (veiled, masculine, hero-artist) but he does so in concert, so to speak, with the other. *Seedbed* thus interrogates “art not as a

‘unique object’ but as a ‘distribution system’ involving the phenomenological ‘interchange’ of subjects within the social” (Jones 105).

The “distribution” of subjective contingency is even more pronounced in Ulay and Abramovic's *Imponderabilia* (1977), in which the two artists, a man and a woman, stand nude and face to face on either side of a narrow door frame through which the audience members must pass to exit the gallery. Unlike the relatively aggressive “Relation in Space” piece to which DeLillo refers, in which the artists smash into each other at high speeds, here, gentle but direct contact (facing the man? the woman?) is elicited for the purpose of complicating hierarchical relations along the line of gender. What it means to be a gendered subject in relation to others is called into question by the inter-subjective sensations provoked in the audience/subject’s passage through flesh. In other words, his or her intimate contact with other bodies and the inevitable choice of facing the “gender-defining” genitalia of one of those bodies ideally serves to prompt an analysis of one’s relation to the gender of his or her confrontational choice.

Bodies in time, as “moments” in shared desire – these are the subjects whose momentary “intertwining” acts, to a greater or lesser degree, upon consciousness within the immediate space and time of the performance. However, as we have seen in the conclusions of a number of postmodern theorists, knowledge of subjective fragmentation does not necessarily translate into action upon that condition. Indeed, particularly where the artist is concerned, this knowledge may serve as a mirror of narcissistic reflection in which the subject may construct himself or herself as the artist-hero, fully cognizant of his or her ailing condition. As Sarraute's “protagonist” explains,

...everything that can more or less be found in us all and which is more or less despised and obliged to conceal itself ... all this in him could be used to erect, to perfect his statue [as monument to his identity as artist], to throw its facets into relief, to bring sparkle into its diverse, improbable, and even shocking aspects, always so delightful to contemplate when they are those of a great genius (*You* 28-9).

It is not too difficult to detect the irony of Sarraute's reference to the "great genius" here. Moreover, he or she is such a one, I would argue, to whom DeLillo refers, in contrast to Lauren, as the "self-strutting" artist. The difference lies in the fact that Lauren's "becoming-monster" is so rooted in tragedy and a consequent productive, creative process of suffering that her performance can only be self-less to the extent that she is not performing a static, "strutting" identity. Rather, like Mr. Tuttle, she "violates the limits of the human" (DeLillo, *Body* 100) in her permeability, as both artist and self in everyday life, the two roles being intimately linked by the novel's conclusion. The "great genius," on the other hand, is merely compelled to exhibit a singular and, quite possibly delusional self that actually forecloses a productive (and perhaps risky) becoming. Of course, it would be useless to presume anything about the impetus of any given artist and his or her work. I draw attention to DeLillo's own distinction, however, in order to illustrate what I perceive as the specific nature of a productive, aesthetic becoming and how this experience might best function in relation to a "somaesthetic" project. For my concern is not with the career artist and his or her aesthetic and personal development, as fascinating and informative to the understanding of a given text as these may be. On the contrary, I am interested in certain "texts" that engage an audience in a particular way and, by extension, provoke a conception and experience of life as itself an aesthetic project.

In a chapter on photography and cinema in his *Downcast Eyes*, Martin Jay offers an explanation for why the reach and impact of theatre began to lessen with the popularization of film. Referencing the pioneering work of Christian Metz, he claims that “unlike theater, in which the actual living figures in front of the spectator were paradoxically too real, too present in flesh and blood, and thus undercut the realistic impact of the diegetic action they portrayed, the cinematic spectacle provided a powerful impression of reality” (467-67). What is important in this observation is the degree to which the performative body is thought to interfere with the believability of the aesthetic project and thus, I would suggest, the potential in the viewer for enduring self-examination and transformation. Though it is not my intention to conflate or argue against theatre and performance art, particularly in light of the imperative of embodiment for which I am calling and the centrality of the body in these media, the sacrifice of such believability that is generally indicative of a “flesh and blood” performance is not entirely unrelated to DeLillo’s notion of “self-strutting.” I would define this performance mode as one in which, at best, the time and the space of the dramatic event are necessarily imbued with a performative self-consciousness, namely, the ego, be it that which acts and expresses or the one that sits quietly in the audience, aware of “possessed” bodies in motion, feigning personality.^{xli}

Doubtless, exceptional performers and theatre actors have transcended and continue to transcend the boundaries of normative “distribution systems.” To further qualify the distinction between body and “non-body” performance, I should add that the privileging of any medium over others as having exclusive access to “reality” is obviously problematic. Still, without becoming ensnared in the modernist trap associated

with 1960's (French) film theory, we might consider the prevalence of such words as "redemption" and "resurrection" as they occur with regard to film's representation of the real as characteristic of that spectacle "that is unaware of our existence and which is part of the universe" (quoted, Jay 460). Perhaps ironically, this quote from André Bazin could be applied to any medium that is not enacted by living, bodily egos – a painting, a photograph, a novel – in that self-consciousness in the aesthetic "moment" is not reciprocal, as in a work like *Seedbed*, for example. Consequently, the other that is ultimately foregrounded in the non-reciprocal "moment" is the subject himself or herself.

It is for this reason that DeLillo's *The Body Artist* strikes me as more compelling than Lauren Hartke's "Body Time," despite the personal and aesthetic value of that character's performance; because the act of reading such a novel prompts a durational and transformative experience that allows for "identifying ourselves in imagination with the moving world before us, which becomes *the* world" (Jay 460), as opposed to a "world" that is filtered through a personality or collection of personalities.^{xlii} Granted, novels don't "move" in the way of film. Nor, however, do they "strut" with self-conscious awareness.^{xliii} The mechanically-reproducible work of art, then, when produced as a "writerly" text, may serve to inform, in embodied time and space, the aesthetic and agentic life without the impediment of *excessive* reality, by which I mean the personality/ego with its implication in mortality and what Lacan characterizes as the real. By virtue of its living humanity, the presence of the other (person, on a stage) communicates and indeed, enforces an identification with the discomfort and the "impossibility" of the real. Whilst I'm not suggesting that there is anything inherently wrong with this dynamic, I would argue that it is excessive to the extent that it impedes a

(spectatorial) experience of self-transformation that is dependent upon transcending the personality/ego. Regardless of its reference to the real, *The Body Artist*, on the other hand, with its impersonal “gaps” and “fissures,” allows me to co-create as an artist, in the time of my own body.

To state the obvious, we are all embodied. Fictional characters, on some level, are also embodied, in language, on paper, on the computer screen. “Becoming-imperceptible,” then, need not be abstracted from lived experience. Nor must it signify the finalization of death, try (and succeed) as some may to follow this drive to its conclusion. Rather, Deleuze’s ultimate aim for writing and, as I have argued, reading, suggests a paradoxical incorporation of and self-effacement in the “now” of language (however “dumb” or abstract this particular time may be), or more specifically, the “silences” between words. A curious marriage between subject and text that is consecrated in the embodied act of reading.

To grasp this process further, we might consider another “aim” expounded in the work of Deleuze and Guattari, namely, the aesthico-political project of “becoming-schizo.” Far from the victim of clinical disease, the Deleuzian schizo functions as “a free man, irresponsible, solitary, joyous, finally able to say and do something simple in his own name, without asking permission, a desire lacking nothing, a flux that overcomes barriers and codes, a name that no longer designates any ego whatever” (quoted, Powell 21). Certainly each protagonist under analysis in this study exhibits some if not all of the qualities listed in Deleuze’s characterization, the subordination of ego (or at least its “visibility”) being foremost among their own projects. Perhaps the most profound

distinction can be made with regards to their respective “freedoms,” DeLillo’s Lauren embodying, quite literally, this condition at its most extreme and profound.

Beyond even Lauren’s “body time,” however, is the potential “freedom” of the reader, his or her own solitude, joy, direction, fulfillment, flux and, finally, imperceptibility as a codified subject – all informing the merger, however temporary, between a permeable text and a self reading. The text, with its “now” time and its “monstrosity” in the form of exposed fragmentation and ironically immobile movements towards obscurity, away from domineering regimes, is thus a medium of self-discovery. The nuptial union, the becoming between two absorbent singularities, unfolds, as Powell observes, “by proxy” (*Deleuze* 54), a process that is as dependent upon a particularly postmodern ethic of selfhood as it is upon indeterminacy. What is discovered in this process may very well be a self whose increasing smallness in relation to the onslaught of contemporary Western culture is a “nothingness” to be cultivated and celebrated.

The next chapter will examine film as another “somaesthetic” practice. Because of its immersive experience (in traditional cinema, anyway, in the theatre, or at least the darkened television room), I consider the “somaesthetic” function of film following my discussion of literary texts to suggest a graduation of sorts. Without negating the impact or claims for the former medium, each shift to a “new art” signifies an increasing intensification of sensory experience and thus (potential) consciousness. This is certainly not to imply that “more is better.” On the contrary, fundamental to each practice is a minimalist quality, if not imperative, about which I will have more to say in relation to music. Nevertheless, the *immediacy* of each art, for my purposes, is its defining feature. Even DeLillo recognizes the profound nature of filmic experience when he exclaims

through the persona of Rey Robles, film director, “the answer to life is in the movies” (*Body* 28). Of course, Rey commits suicide. I shall leave it to the present reader to ponder this irony.

Four | Lights Camera Action

Certainly one of the central points of difference between film and “live” performance is the degree to which each form is able (or inclined) to represent reality. On one hand, a preoccupation with reality is characteristic of postmodern theory in so far as the “truth” of subtext, of meaning and ideology beneath the surface (or constituting the surface in a brash display of “dominant fictionality”), of imperforate subjectivity, is the general target of analysis. On the other hand, it seems that no definitive notion of the real is permissible in the postmodern age; and rightfully so, given the limitations of the human intellect, its vulnerability to unskillful emotion, conceit and predatory simulacra. So the question of reality in aesthetic experience, I would argue, is only productive in so far as it illuminates the nature and quality of that experience. As Susan Sontag suggests in her essay “Film and Theatre,” “whether objects (like film or painting) or performances (like music or theatre), all art is first a mental act, a fact of consciousness” (348). Precarious though this “fact” may be, the perceiving subject ultimately has the final say

in determining artistic value and reality; hence my concern with those aesthetic “instruments” which provide a time and a space in which a self/body may begin (or continue) the liminal process of becoming-“new.”

The theatrical “exchange” between audience and performer that is generally thought to distinguish live performance from film, by signifying a greater degree of reciprocity and thus a necessary apprehension of self and (human) other, is, to some extent, precisely what I wish to counter with my own version of “somaesthetics.” The latter, I will argue, presents rather than represents an experience of reality, however disruptive of the Symbolic Order this experience may be. Indeed, it is this very disruption that makes the difference between such a presentation and a representation in which the “flesh and blood” bodies of performers are inevitably known to be “standing in for” an expression of otherness; the acting body a presence whose personality, rarely very far from the character surface to be completely obscured, serves as a constant reminder that a performance is being given. With the filmic texts that I discuss here as “somaesthetic” practice, however, there is obviously no reciprocal “distribution system,” to reference Acconci, beyond what the viewer invests (or divests) of his or her personality/ego in the process of spectating.

To return briefly to Cortazar, Michel’s encounter with the “cinematic” manifestation of his photograph blow-up does more than provoke his conscience in relation to the other. As phantasmatic as the imagery may be, it nevertheless prompts a new and “impossibly” real experience of self. As Turner explains, Michel “has achieved this security [his position of integrated subjectivity] via the cinema, by becoming a

spectator before the movie screen” (“Subject” 17). This is quite a radical gesture on the part of Cortazar, Turner continues, in that

the institution of cinema – spectatorial, historical, capitalistic – wills the construction of a unified spectating subject who by definition cannot be conscious of his or her own constitution within the filmic apparatus. Thus Cortazar’s foregrounding of the process of subject assembly, his thematization of that process, threatened the very ideological foundations of that institution (*Subject* 18).

Certainly, in the wake of Mulvey’s early analysis and its subsequent commentator’s, the “construction of a unified spectating subject” has been challenged, though what Cortazar is pursuing here, along with Sontag in her concluding assertion that “we need a new idea [of/for art]” (*Film* 355), is a refinement of aesthetic (in this case, filmic) instrumentation that contributes to integrated subjectivity – to agentic selfhood. Film clearly has a role to play in this “new art” in so far as it “achieves a sort of resurrection of the archaic vision of the world in recovering the virtually exact superposition of practical perception and magical vision – their syncretic conjunction” (quoted, Jay *Downcast* 461). This quote from Edgar Morin is not without its romanticism, stemming, no doubt, from the burgeoning enthusiasm of mid-century film theory. I include it, however, because the “archaic” and “magical” vision, of which film purportedly instigates a resurrection, would seem to be integral to a “new art” and the selfhood by which it is engaged. In my understanding and application of these terms, they point to an experience of reality that is at once cognizant of cultural interpellation and uniquely self-aware.^{xliv} In other words, the cinema viewer, like the literary reader, is allowed a certain reflective isolationism in relation to a text that is “unaware of our existence,” Michel’s animated photograph notwithstanding.

What happens (or has the potential to happen) in this isolated space is perhaps best understood, again, in terms of Deleuze's own schizoanalytic film theory in which "signs of the 'movies' are not frozen symbols, but elements of movement and vibrations of force. As well as carrying representational meaning, images are material forces: shades of colour, intensities of light and timbres of sound" (Powell, *Deleuze* 116). As with certain literary texts, then, the filmic text offers an *experience* that is especially indicative of praxis (defined by Kaustuv Roy as "a transformative mode of perception-in-action" (*Teachers* 1)) when constituted by Beckettian "holes," "silences" and "intervals" that may be distinguished from structures of representational signification. In the "silences" of such film, the "becoming-schizo" is allowed both aural and visual validation of his or her imperceptibility in a very particular "now," what Werner Herzog designates as the "ecstatic time" (*Incident*) of film.

David Lynch's Silence

A recent viewing of David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001) confirms a number of observations for me. First, as the other with whom I am watching the film articulates, verbally and otherwise, the filmic "world" must remain true to certain conventions if it is to sustain and nurture the reflection mentioned above for a majority of viewers. I am thus reminded that a shadow figure of Aristotle continues to lurk halls or living rooms of performativity, in addition to the domain of literary narrative, exerting a profound influence on how we experience and evaluate art as dictated by the necessity of empathy with characters, the recognition of a defined course of action, the reward of an anticipated (or surprisingly unexpected) dénouement. Each of these criteria points to a particular

perception of (aesthetic) reality which thrives despite the Baudrillardian radar that informs a certain strata of viewers/readers/listeners – a perception that may extend to the very subjectivity of the art consumer, who, like the superior Aristotelian theatrical production, “represents” a “unified whole.”

The disruption of this reality is particularly offensive to the other with whom I share the viewing experience when its eroticism is perceived as superfluous at best. Here again, the body, even the filmic body, must signify desire that is clearly warranted by (or codified in) the narrative as a whole. The disruption, the apparently gratuitous lesbianism offered by a male director, is problematic for my companion to say the least. Whilst I myself am by no means impervious to the allure of this eroticism, I am also sensitive to what could be considered the needless objectification of the female body and the Gaze that seeks to consume me. But Lynch has taken us beyond this hackneyed scenario. I argue that his films, including this one, are both profound and timely because they provoke the real, the body/self in a given version of the real, at the same time that they illuminate its “impossibility” as a static, uniform phenomenon. The experience of this illumination is especially pronounced at the cinema, the material and psychologically hermetic architecture of which I will demonstrate to be crucial to the “instrumentation” of Lynch’s assault on Hollywood and the illusory fictions that it often perpetuates.

From the opening sequence of *Muholland Drive*, we are met with an idealistic fantasy that will slowly (and then, quite suddenly) unravel into a comparatively degenerate and discombobulating, narrative. One of the qualities of this and other films from Lynch’s oeuvre, however, is the ambiguity of the real that Lynch offers without compromising his compulsion to expose the underside of the sanitized surface. The

social (read: Hollywood) corruption and thanatos that come to govern the universe of *Muholland Drive*, then, are clearly exemplary of a postmodern project in that they serve to remind us of the severe limitations of our subjectivity (through severed identities and disjunctive narratives) at the same time that they merely play a role in an otherwise amusing and quirky depiction of North America. In the logic of this film, America is Hollywood, replete with all of the social and psychological trappings that such a metaphor suggests. On the other hand, like a number of theorists who propose (at least a theoretical) development of the subject, *Muholland Drive* is not without a conscience, an aspect of the film's sensibility that shall become apparent with analysis.

Even the briefest acquaintance with Lynch compels the first-time viewer of *Mulholland Drive* to suspect the colorful collage of jitterbugging youth during the opening credits to be less than auspicious. Over this festivity is juxtaposed the face of the character we will soon come to know as Betty, a blond, would-be starlet whose intentions in Hollywood – to achieve both celebrity status and aesthetic integrity – are equally dubious. Prior to her official entrance, however, Lynch fulfills our expectations by cutting to a road, Muholland Dr, illuminated by ominous headlights in the dark. The camera snakes along the pavement in conjunction with its curves, as it will continue to do, organically, in more intimate spaces, thus positioning the viewer as trespasser and voyeur. In the backseat of the car is a made-up brunette who, following a crash, escapes both an intended execution by another passenger and the destruction of the car. Now suffering amnesia, she stumbles down the side of a hill and into the grand city of Hollywood, also illuminated and comparably foreboding in light of the typical Lynchian soundtrack that signifies abjection. The brunette makes her way into the home of a

woman departing for Canada, where she will eventually encounter a blond companion, fellow detective, lover and murderer.

On her flight to Hollywood from a small town in Ontario, Betty is befriended by an older couple, kindly, archetypal grandparents who accompany her as she emerges from the depths of the airport to the sun-drenched landscape of southern California. Moments after she arrives at her aunt's home, her temporary residence whilst she auditions for roles, she meets the battered Rita (a name quickly borrowed from a film poster featuring Rita Hayworth), whose head injury and lack of identity, not to mention beauty, endear her to the innocent Betty. Thus begins the fantasy narrative in which the two women undertake to discover Rita's true identity. Amidst this search, a number of side plots unfold with more or less apparent clarity and relevance to the Betty/Rita line. These include the "Winkies" diner episode wherein a man shares his nightmare about a "monster" behind the diner and a thread that follows film director Adam Kesher through a process of divorce and uncanny usurpation of his current film. Of course, these stories do relate to Betty and Rita, though not necessarily to the characters who go by these names in the first half of the film.

The name Diane Selwyn is triggered in Rita as the two women search for information. At Winkies, they are served by a woman whose nametag reads Diane, her vague resemblance to Betty a clue to the real identity-crisis at the center of the film's conflict. When they discover the mysterious name in the phonebook and visit her home, a curiously dilapidated version of the relatively luxurious Aunt Ruth's, not only is Diane not Rita, she is dead and decomposing. Aside from Rita's accident and a few instances in which the "Betty" narrative is interrupted by mostly comical or absurd vignettes, the

discovery of Diane Selwyn's body is the first serious intrusion of danger and death. It resonates with the two women and sets the stage for two critical events that occur in the night – a shared love scene and an escapade at the Club Silencio where they behold the painful spectacle of simulacra, centralized in an enigmatic blue box that Betty pulls from her purse. That they are both blond at this point in the narrative (Rita wears a wig for protection) at once solidifies their fusional, post-sex inclination and substantiates the degree to which they are about to be ripped apart as a result of accessing the blue box. Following this night, the narrative shifts to reveal Betty's true identity as Diane and Rita as Camilla, Diane's former lover and acting peer. The tragedy of *Mulholland Drive* slowly unfolds in the form of Diane's jealousy-inspired murder (she hires a hit man) of Camilla and her subsequent guilt-ridden suicide.

If there is an ongoing theme in this film, and indeed, in Lynch's work as a whole, it is that nothing is as it seems. This is particularly the case with identity, the vulnerability of which to both interior and exterior forces inevitably disrupts a cherished (or simply unquestioned) notion of self. The "world" that characters inhabit, of course, is itself wildly fluid and collaborates with inner states to affect a malignancy of self-knowledge; hence the foregrounding of simulacra at the Club Silencio to which I will return in a moment. The amorphous and consequently ambiguous quality of self and (human) other in *Mulholland Drive* becomes apparent with a number of events. Rita is clearly other than who she appears to be from the beginning. Not long after she and Betty meet, however, Betty is approached by a "witch" character at her door, Louise, who, responding to the former's introduction ("My name's Betty"), claims, "no it's not. That's not what she said. Someone's in trouble." From this point on, it is Betty's

identity that we are compelled to question. Her first audition, for example, yields an uninhibited and hyper-sensual performance that stands in obvious contrast to the innocence that has defined her thus far. Likewise, the first lesbian sequence exposes her body as well as a smoldering, “transgressive” sexuality that, as I suggest above, is indicative of the fusion between the two women as of the very real relation that has existed between Diane and Camilla. Their experience at Club Silencio confirms, at least theoretically, the fact that illusion is a governing force in their lives. Featuring a cabaret in which performers pretend to sing or play whilst the host is eerily forthcoming about the illusion of it all, the club acts as a liminal space for the final “cut into the referent” of Betty’s identity to be executed.

In his essay on the film, Allen B. Ruch states that on the other side of Club Silencio, “the fantasy is over, and all that’s left is the realization of horror and the mocking pursuit of the furies”(“No Hay...”). Indeed, as the glowing Betty yields to the reality of Diane, the fantasy of *Muholland Drive* comes to an end, its realization as fantasy as constitutive of the “horror” as death itself. Horrible though the deaths may be, however, I would suggest that in this realization lies a “blue key” to the conscience of the film. For in so far as the fantasy and the reality are inextricably linked (or convolved), they compel us to recognize our own implication, not simply in the dystopia of Hollywood society, but in a mode of existence that is ever at the crossroads of fantasy and reality, a mode to which any self is susceptible. Lynch provokes a questioning of each pole and the manner in which they inform one another to delude and destroy lives; such lives, for example, as the homeless man/monster behind the restaurant who returns by the film’s conclusion to drop a paper bag containing the blue box, out of which run

miniature figures of the grandparent characters from the beginning. Despite, and perhaps, because of his monstrosity, this character *is* the reality beneath the surface of sanitized Hollywood. He/she possesses the “truth” and allows it to run rampant, to the home of Diane Selwyn, where it, in the form of the now demented seniors, haunts Diane to the point of suicide. And like the homeless person on Silverman’s Telegraph Avenue in Berkley, Lynch’s monster forces us to look him/her in the eyes, in close-up, and to respect, however damaged, his/her subjectivity.

Ruch goes further to suggest that an equation might be drawn between the monster, the grandparents and Club Silencio, and the id, the ego and the superego, respectively. Whilst the latter of these parallels seems appropriate enough, as the filmmaker himself admonishing us to look/listen, conscientiously, beyond the simulacra, we might also consider the monster, in light of DeLillo’s corresponding creation, as a more porous entity, rather than as a mere representation of the chaotic grotesque. Of course, he/she is in fact grotesque, but is not without the scheming and instructional impulses characteristic of the ego and the superego. As in *The Body Artist* and, to a lesser degree, “Blow-Up,” we have something to learn from aberrancy.

It is perhaps at no other site that the potentially aberrant, the dangerously uncanny, is more capable of manifesting itself than in/as the female body in the context of Lynch’s film (as well as DeLillo’s novel). What it has to teach is precisely the value of becoming-other, of opening oneself to a line of flight from molar to molecular engagement with oneself and one’s environment.^{xlv} To be specific, we might speak of a becoming-woman that, “more than any other becoming, possesses a special introductory power; it is not so much that women are witches, but that sorcery proceeds by way of this

becoming-woman” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 248). The “sorcery” of woman, far from being relegated to actual witchery (the character of Louise), then, suggests a particular susceptibility to and promotion of liminal experience. As Martha P. Nochimson explains, “this electrifying female has crucial implications for the survival of the creative moment, a theme of abiding importance to Lynch” (“All I Need...” 165). Periodic reference to “the girl” in *Mulholland Drive*, the one (or the many) whose role in Adam Kesher’s film is both dictated by the powers that be in Hollywood and central to the unfolding of desire in Lynch’s dystopia, is thus “the rhizomatic line and the threshold into [the] alternative world [of becoming-other,-woman,-imperceptible]” (Soitirin, “Becoming...” 108).

On the other hand, as is clear by the narrative’s preoccupation with adulterated reality and death, the power of woman, and specifically of Betty/Diane, to obfuscate both interior and exterior negative forces is severely curtailed in Lynch’s film. As Nochimson asserts, “it is the circumstantial defeat of the integrity of that possibility [becoming-woman] that renders the subconscious toxic: bodies that mask emptiness with their seeming heft, but which slide into decomposition in the absence of a healthy imaginative face that might have sustained them as creations” (“All I Need...” 177-78). For Deleuze and Guattari, of course, the psychic space of the “subconscious” can be positive as well as negative, its toxicity a product of stasis, the lack of creative force and movement. But to “become” a woman in this film, any woman, is not without dire consequences.

Ultimately, I would suggest with Ruch that the real lesson of *Mulholland Drive* is given at and by the Club Silencio. In addition to overt declarations from the host (“There is no band. It is an illusion”), a return to the club, to a mysterious woman with blue hair

sitting confidently in a balcony, offers the final word of the film – “silencio.” Silence. The (temporary) cessation of sound, dialogue, performance. There are any number of ways to interpret Lynch’s conclusion, though what I find most striking about this word in the context of *Mulholland Drive* is its anomaly. Characters weep, scream and banter their discontent until death has its way and “silence” leaves us with a slow fade to black. Regardless of how one reads this conclusion, the fact is that some manifestation of silence constitutes the final resonance of the film. My impression is that Lynch seeks to quiet the self (through the voice of a woman who is herself an anomaly within the film’s psychic and narrative architecture) that succumbs to illusion at the hands of Hollywood or otherwise, an impression that may find confirmation in Lynch’s by now well-known interest in meditation.^{xlvi} But like so many elements in a Lynchian universe, the silence is not necessarily there to be interpreted. Rather, its assertion, particularly in the context of an environment (Club Silencio) in which such powerful emotions have been exchanged and expressed over the loss of identity, I would argue, is to be felt, not simply as a mandate, but as a potential mode of (postmodern) experience.

Whatever significance it may have from other perspectives, the scene provides a generous segue into the remaining “texts” under discussion in this study in that silence gradually becomes a significant, if not dominating quality, as it does in *Mulholland Drive*. In other words, one will notice that each text, and indeed, each medium, is further removed from language. Just how far one can go in this direction, in the “silence” of a filmic *intervalle noir*, in lived, corporeal experience, shall ultimately remain within the jurisdiction of the viewer/reader.

Stanley Kubrick's Educated Body

Whether we are being directed towards an ambiguous but compelling silence or taunted with the loaded claim that “you don’t love yourself,” the “procession of delegates” – as filmic subject, as viewer or reader – marches on with the knowledge that there is nothing stable about selfhood. *Mulholland Drive* is characteristic of such a journey, exposing the operation of unconscious drives and, like Sarraute’s fragmented selves, leaving us to ponder, or better, to observe from a distance the extent of our subservience to forces that multiply and delude us. Deleuze and Guattari’s assertion that “a schizophrenic out for a walk is a better model than a neurotic on the analyst’s couch” (*Anti-Oedipus 2*) justifies this journey in the face of psychoanalytic territorializations that collude with our impulses to hinder becoming. The notion of multiplicity is problematic in this context, of course, in that a clinically-diagnosed schizophrenic is unwell, his or her free reign of unconscious desire, perhaps the rhizomatic self *in extremis*, indicative of malady rather than freedom. And yet, if we are to conceive of and implement a “somaesthetics,” a praxis of becoming-agent, the “walk” is necessary. What we find in the work of Sarraute and Lynch is a crossing of the threshold that opens to the outdoors, the light of day beyond the confines of Plato’s cave. Other texts propose a similar journey but take us further in the direction of becoming without madness.^{xlvii}

The final film of his career, Stanley Kubrick’s *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) does not close its eyes to the perilous path of self-knowledge; that it stands as his final cinematic achievement makes the protagonist’s brushes with death all the more poignant and “real.” Moreover, like *Mulholland Drive*, Kubrick’s film challenges realism along with the aesthetic and philosophical presumptions that naturalize our formulas or “fictions.” Both

directors achieve their goals of questioning such presumptions by foregrounding unconscious processes and action. As with Betty/Diane, protagonist Bill Harford undertakes an embodied, psychic journey, contrary to his common wish for stability and comfort, that leads him to bizarre and seemingly inexplicable circumstances, all of which prove to be manifestations of an unconscious movement towards self-knowledge, painful though this process may be. Certain filmic elements contribute to the breach of realism as well: the relatively slow pace at which the film moves by virtue of its grounded, relatively stationary cinematography (though there are a number of glaring exceptions to which I will refer in a moment), and the stilted, stylized and repetitive dialogue that perpetuates the film's gradual unfolding in time, for example.

Eyes Wide Shut differs from Lynch's comparatively bleak universe, however, in a number of other, equally important ways. The tragedy of *MulHolland Drive*, the death of its would-be starlet, serves the purpose of substantiating Lynch's attack on the institution of Hollywood and the polished simulacra of reality that it proffers to the world. *Eyes Wide Shut*, on the other hand, though certainly critical of the institution of marriage, focuses on an individual and is therefore free to explore the possibility of that individual's psychological and corporeal development.^{xlviii} Considering the protagonist's evasion of death, not once but twice, one is even inclined to think that there is a benevolent force pulling him back from the abyss at the last minute; hardly the case in *Mulholland Drive*. As to the nature of this force, I would suggest that for Kubrick, despite the film's source in a novella, Arthur Schnitzler's *Traumnovelle* (1926), that is itself rooted in Freudian psychoanalysis, the "realm" of unconscious desire is not necessarily reductive to neurotic tendencies. On the contrary, as Deleuze and Guattari

demonstrate, desire can be productive, of healthy deterritorializations as well as of cruelty and suffering, all of which are present in *Eyes Wide Shut*. The benevolence behind Bill Harford's Steppenwolf-like adventure that keeps him from harm is that which springs from his own desire to confront hazard.^{xlix} After being obliged to do so, of course.

If this benevolence is in any way embodied in the film, it most certainly takes a feminine form. The first, and ultimately most productive of these forms, is Bill's wife, Alice. Her nude body is the subject of the film's opening shot, undressing for the viewer/voyeur and offering little more than titillation until we see her on the toilet whilst preparing for an evening out. These two images complement one another by grounding the ideal body in the real (excretion), thus validating its/her embodiment, at once functional and beautiful. In responding to her question "how do I look?" her husband, on the other hand, reveals his lack of corporeal groundedness when he answers without actually seeing her. He lies. From this moment on, Bill will have to face the consequences of living a life that sees and feels with the cold distance of a medical doctor, Bill's profession and his link to privilege that is made audible with Kubrick's inclusion of the illustrious Waltz 2 by Shostakovich.

The couple attends an elaborate party thrown by one of Bill's patients, Victor Ziegler, where they are both tempted by infidelity. Alice eventually chooses to be faithful, in contradistinction to Bill, who is merely led away from a potential tryst (to "where the rainbow ends") by a more pressing matter, a woman, an acquaintance of Victor's, on the verge of drug-related death. The night after the party, Bill and Alice argue about differences between male and female desire, leading Alice to confess the degree to which she is capable of "transgressive" fantasy. The scenes that follow take

Bill on a journey towards sex and death without allowing him to succumb to either. Once Alice has made her confession, he is compelled to leave home to visit a grieving daughter whose father has just died. Bill carries himself with a cool, strategic detachment that characterizes his social relations in general. Marion, the daughter, is comforted by him, until her vulnerability becomes excessive and she expresses her love for Bill only moments before her fiancé is to arrive. Excusing himself, Bill walks the streets of New York and soon encounters a prostitute, Domino, who invites him to her apartment for what anyone familiar with the film career of Tom Cruise might call risky business. Once inside, he is unable to choose what he wants from her. Domino suggests, “why don’t you just leave it up to me?” to which he responds, “I’m in your hands,” thereby relinquishing the responsibility for his pleasure and his subjectivity to a stranger. A call on his mobile from Alice cuts this pleasure short.

When Bill does manage to chart his own course, he does so with a self-serving cockiness, as when he convinces his old friend, Nick Nightengale, now a pianist, to get him into an exclusive fetish event at which Nick is performing. Beforehand, he must obtain a costume, which he does by flaunting his M.D. card and plenty of cash to the owner of Rainbow Costumes. If the viewer has not recognized it thus far, the frequency with which Bill crosses thresholds into liminal spaces becomes apparent here, the camera in tracking shot mode, moving ever closer to the uncanny. The shop owner escorts his client through various rooms and corridors until they reach what appears to be the heart of the business, a room where the owner’s scantily clad, underage daughter appears with two Japanese men, the three of whom are obviously engaged in sexual activity. The owner feigns rage but tends to his client’s needs nevertheless. Arriving at the fetish event

soon thereafter, at an estate well outside the city, Bill exercises his bravura one last time with a taxi driver whom he convinces to wait at the gate through which, psychologically at least, there is no turning back.

Each of these experiences occurs over a period of one night, a night fuelled by Bill's newfound jealousy. As might be expected, the turning point entails more thresholds, the last of which leads to an inner sanctum replete with masked figures and nude women. Shostakovich has been replaced by Ligeti, ominous piano notes that repeat and transition with a sharp intensity that parallels the repetition common to the film's dialogue. Once an introductory ceremony is complete, Bill, "accompanied" by the viewer's own cinematographic gaze, winds from room to room, observing bodies engaged in group sex (recalling Lynch's forays into intensely private experiences), until he is taken aside by a woman, also masked, who tells him that he is in danger and must leave. Alas, it is too late, and Bill is again escorted to the main hall where he is exposed as an outsider and forced to remove his mask before the other participants. Before any harm can come to him, however, the woman returns and speaks: "Stop! Let him go. I am ready to redeem him," whereupon he is released, despite the potentially perilous consequences for his "redeemer."

Concerned for the well-being of the woman, and still agonizing over Alice's admission of desire for other men (which she corroborates by sharing a dream involving multiple acts of infidelity upon his arrival home), Bill spends the succeeding day searching for clues to make sense of his nocturnal journey. In so doing, he finds that Domino has since tested positive for HIV, that Nick Nightengale has been beaten and put on a plane to Seattle, that the woman who saved him at the fetish event has died and,

finally, that Victor was present at his “unmasking.” In a brilliantly acted exchange in Victor’s lavish billiards room, the terror of the event is labeled a “charade” and the woman’s death an inevitability that Bill himself forecasted (at Victor’s party, where she nearly overdosed). Regardless of the truth behind the actions of the previous night and Victor’s Mephistophelean reassurance, Bill remains dismayed. He is left to return home to find his mask, initially assumed lost, lying on his pillow, carefully placed by his wife, whereupon Bill breaks down and offers his own confession.

The film concludes with the couple Christmas shopping in a toy store with their daughter, Helena. Their future in question, Bill once again places the responsibility of determining an answer on another when he asks, “Alice, what do you think we should do?” Alice responds by suggesting that they are, to quote a newspaper headline to which Bill remains oblivious earlier in the film, “lucky to be alive,” irrespective of the reality or unreality of their “adventures.” Moreover, she continues, they are awake now, “and hopefully, for a long time to come.” Bill’s presumptuous exclamation of “forever” is met with caution. The one thing of which Alice is absolutely certain, however, is the importance of what they “need to do as soon as possible. Fuck.”

Cinematically realistic though *Eyes Wide Shut* may be, reality is “real” for Bill and Alice to the same degree that the unconscious is “real.” That is to say that whether their adventures have been a dream or otherwise is ultimately inconsequential. The crossing of thresholds and the removal of masks, whilst obvious psychoanalytic metaphors, are nonetheless indicative of embodied transformation. Bill “becomes-imperceptible,” in the corridors of the unconscious, though he eventually emerges with a capacity to see and be seen. What matters, then, is the imperative facing them both, but

particularly Bill, to awaken and to stay awake in the body. Transformation, in this respect, implies a becoming-other, or, once the “rooms” of the protagonist’s less conventional drives have been entered and the mask is removed, a becoming-self. And this new self must be physically as well as psychically awake. He/she must be attentive to the experience of his or her embodiment as well as to that of the other. Hence the urgency of Alice’s prescription, a “fuck” that will presumably, and crucially, diverge from the lying and the fantasy-laden experiences of the past in so far as it will be informed by a heightened level of attention.

Of course, such a presumption is a bit like reading an additional act into a play, heaping fiction upon fiction. Theorist and composer Michel Chion nevertheless reads the progression of *Eyes Wide Shut* from the standpoint of what it “becomes” both within and beyond its filmic or narrative borders. He asserts, “I find it reasonable to see the film as being situated between the first *image* of a person stripping, and the last *word* that proposes a sexual act (to which the movie’s abrupt ending leaves the spectator to imagine or, if s/he desires, to act on...)” (*Kubrick’s* 170). This final word, then, is, ideally, provocative of action, not simply on the part of the protagonist whose psychic and physical journey has prepared him for future becomings, but in relation to the spectator; the instruction being to “fuck” conscientiously and consciously. It matters little that Bill remains relatively passive in his instruction, as the viewer has accompanied him on this journey and has received the same wisdom, the ultimate imperative to awaken, a process that clearly evokes sexual energy and knowledge and is therefore necessarily an embodied process. On the other hand, one also observes a warning: that the cycle of lying and disembodiment is just that, a powerfully normative process of acculturation, and

adulteration, as evidenced by Helena's desire for a baby-stroller and a Barbie doll, signifiers of the bourgeois tendencies that invest "forever" with its insidious cult of the monolithic family, its potential stasis and mediocrity. Keeping one's eyes shut to these tendencies, the film assures us, guarantees a sterilized immobility of the body/self.

Opening one's eyes, however, may not be as simple as making the decision to do so. When we first encounter Bill, he is comfortable, he lives up to the responsibilities of the entitlement that he has ascribed to himself as a successful doctor, he exudes confidence, he "loves himself." There is no apparent reason for him to change. Consequently, as the inevitable unfolds, he is aided by others, others, mostly women, who suffer and die. I would like to address this problem as a way to transition into the final section of this chapter on Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice*. It is a problem to the extent that the question of gender violence must be raised, the seemingly misogynistic martyring of women that we find in Beckett, Toussaint, DeLillo and Lynch, that which recalls another female martyr in Lars von Trier's *Breaking the Waves* (or, indeed, most any of his recent films). As with the latter's protagonist, Bess (who sacrifices her life in a brutal manner for the sake of her husband), I would argue, what distinguishes the martyrs of *Eyes Wide Shut* from mere victims is the fact they embody knowledge of their sacrificial acts as "redeemers" – the prostitute at the orgy; Alice herself as granter of wisdom and sufferer of her husband's own awkwardness. These characters proactively choose their fates. To the sacrifice of von Trier's Bess is added a spiritual component, a particular practice that I will consider in another context. For now I conclude the discussion of *Eyes Wide Shut* by suggesting that Bill's potential becoming at the cost of other lives and other subjectivities is productive both because and in spite of other fates. Moreover, the

acknowledged productivity on the part of these others justifies their actions/sacrifices. Victor Ziegler, whose implication in the prostitute's death nevertheless compels us to trust his own knowledge, explains that the death has nothing to do with Bill. Even without this testimony, the couple has advanced beyond the confines of Bill's arrested embodiment, encouraging the same productivity beyond the filmic borders where death and responsibility give the viewer's "real," we might say, its core value.

The obvious parallel with characters who suffer or perish in order to further the development of others, or another, is the figure of Christ. Problematic though it may be, this link arguably provides the only perspective from which to justify what these subjects, male or female, endure. Upon viewing *Breaking The Waves* in a graduate film class and expressing my praise to a peer, I am told that "we need to talk," the obvious subtext being that I am as deeply disturbed as the filmmaker if I accept Bess' sacrifice as valid. I will refrain from an extended review of the von Trier film here except to say that the accusations of misogyny that he continues to receive speak as much to a general discomfort with certain manifestations of sacrifice that exceed normative logic and morality (unlike others, such as war, that operate under the rubric of honor, etc) as they do to gender inequality and violence. Clearly, the mythological/historical Passion evokes, amongst other things, the limitations of human reason where suffering is concerned.

Of course, the suffering of fictional characters is given life (and perhaps validation) by living writers and filmmakers. Though it is not my place to guess at what these artists "mean" by inflicting such violence on specifically female characters, there is clearly a Silvermanian problematic at work in so far as the artists evoke a drive towards

self-effacement that both requires the (libidinal) sacrifice of a human other and repudiates that other for being a mere instrument in the protagonist's ascent (or descent) to self-awareness. In the case of Toussaint's *The Bathroom*, for example, Edmondsson functions as an object of desire who nevertheless intrudes upon the male protagonist's drive towards the silence of solitude. Kubrick's *The Shining* offers a more obvious example of such aggression in its treatment of Jack and Wendy Torrance, a couple besieged by the husband's haunted abusiveness in an isolated domesticity. Where this film parts company with most of the texts under consideration here is in its vindication of the female protagonist and her child for whom the deranged husband/father must eventually be sacrificed for the betterment, one can only assume, of their lives.

Crucially, however, *The Shining* also departs from the texts at hand in that its redemption (of the well being of mother and child) is localized in the everyday necessity of a standard of living that precludes domestic violence. As such, its thematic development rests upon the amelioration of a purely negative, familial condition. *Eyes Wide Shut*, on the other hand, charts a psychic movement towards wakefulness and embodiment that counters the frozen death of Jack Torrance. In other words, salvation assumes an increasingly complex and psychic quality with the texts as I order them in the context of this analysis. DeLillo's Lauren, in *The Body Artist*, not only stands in opposition to the male protagonist by virtue of her gender, but engages in a relatively sophisticated (relative to Toussaint's anonymous male protagonist, for example) course towards salvation and individuation (though I would argue that even the "bathroom" provides a more advanced space of psychic development for Toussaint's character than Jack's Overlook Hotel in *The Shining*). Despite the degree to which violence, perpetrated

upon either gender, limits the “somaesthetic” experience of these texts, then, it is nevertheless possible to distinguish among the nature of various character trajectories relative to the sacrifices made, or compelled, around them, and to identify those trajectories on a scale from basic and essential to exceptional and, perhaps, sacred. Certainly my peer is correct in his assertion that we need to talk, though there is a multiplicity, rather than a monolithic singularity, of discussions to be had.

Andrey Tarkovsky’s Sacrifice

In a chapter from his *Sculpting in Time*, Andrey Tarkovsky comments upon self-sacrifice as an action that defies common assumptions about appropriate behavior and fulfillment. He asserts that it “precludes, by its very nature, all of those selfish interests that make up a ‘normal’ rationale for action; it refutes the laws of a materialistic worldview. It is often absurd and unpractical” (217). And further, in characterizing the “space” occupied by such activity, he claims that it “becomes a rare, distinctive point of contrast to the empirical concepts of our experience, an area where reality – I would say – is all the more strongly present” (217). In the “other worlds” of *Mulholland Drive*, *Eyes Wide Shut* and Tarkovsky’s film, *The Sacrifice* (1986), “reality” is manipulated beyond conventional cinematic presentations of space and time and thus functions like the “holy fool,” “that pilgrim or ragged beggar whose very presence [affects] people living ‘normal’ lives and whose soothsaying and self-negation [is] always at variance with the ideas and established rules of the world at large” (227). In addition to Christ, we might think of Nordier’s eccentric but productive “*fou littéraire*,” or following Shusterman, of Diogenes the Cynic, or the “Sufi” Mullah Nasr Eddin, as examples of this character that

exhibits bizarre behavior as a means of instruction. The general theme of this instruction tends to suggest, more or less provocatively, that the real is indeed “rare” and distinct from normative conduct.

Like *Eyes Wide Shut*, *The Sacrifice* stands as the director’s final film, the completion of which was periodically interrupted by the necessity of Tarkovsky being in hospital. One perceives in both films a sense of immediacy, despite the slow, measured pace at which they move, propelling the exploration and dissemination of their various insights. The most obvious of these brought by *The Sacrifice* is the great value of enacting the film’s title. As is made clear, this is no easy task, particularly when the fate of the world is at stake and those who occupy the world do so as the subjects with which we are now familiar, multiplicitous entities whose cultural environments only serve to exacerbate the illusion of dominant fictions and, ultimately, the reality of fragmentation. What is important in this insight, however, is the call to action that does what words can only signify by generating a physical experience of reality.

Leonardo da Vinci’s painting *Adoration of the Magi* opens *The Sacrifice* with a slow vertical pan moving from the scene of the Christ-child surrounded by admirers up to the leaves of a tree. The tree emerges as one of numerous symbols in the film that entices an intellectual analysis without obfuscating the fact that this is finally a film about action and ritual. It reappears instantly in a comparatively vast Swedish landscape when we first meet the protagonist, Alexander, an intellectual and former actor, and his young son whom we know only as Little Man. They are planting a Japanese tree, prompting the loquacious father to share a story of a monk who watered a tree every day at the same time for three years in ritualistic fashion until it finally bloomed. Such action, Alexander

explains, can change the world. This statement, along with the Christ imagery and the allusion to arborescent/organic, and by extension, cultural/personal development, encapsulates the film's ethos.¹ However, there remains a ritual for Alexander, and indeed, for the viewer, to accept and undergo before change can intervene in the "world at large."

As they finish their planting, the father and son are joined by Otto, a postman, who delivers a birthday card to Alexander and proceeds to wax philosophic about his interest in Nietzsche. His presence informs us that the initial storybook scenario and its mythic innocence is in fact not the whole story; that the most immediate ritual will entail a confrontation with modern life and its particular challenges. Otto finally leaves them to carry on with his delivery, whereupon Alexander and Little Man retire in a lush grove, beneath another tree that is mature enough to provide support. Now it is Alexander who philosophizes whilst the son, temporarily mute from a throat operation, plays and listens. The monologue continues until Alexander suddenly becomes aware of himself pontificating. "God, how weary I am of this talk! Words, words, words!" he exclaims. "If only someone could stop talking and Do something instead." He is then accosted by Little Man, who jumps on him playfully only to be thrown off in a seemingly unconscious but harmful counter attack. The boy sits alarmed and bleeding, his father remorseful.

Cut to a black and white image, another slow, vertical pan that moves downward this time over a scene of urban filth and decay, apocalyptic in its disunity, relative to the sylvan grove. With no apparent relevance to what has come before, this scene that will appear once more, in a different context, testifies to the chaos of identity and

circumstance with which the film's characters, particularly Alexander, will have to contend. It signifies, we might reflect, the brutal turmoil born of mediocrity, as condemned by Nietzsche. And yet, we are not left to dwell on this image. Another cut to icons of Christ, as depicted in the leisurely-turned pages of an art book. Alexander is now in his home, accompanied by his friend and doctor, Victor. Though sparingly decorated, the home's interior connotes wealth and plenitude, complementary rather than inimical to the rural landscape in its rich, wooded color scheme. Despite the foregrounding of verbalized ideas, the film's cinematography allows the image (of the tree, the apocalypse, the Christ, the home and its multiple spaces) to function as a character in itself, such that events, peopled or otherwise, become iconic. This "iconography" continues to play out as other characters enter the increasingly fractured narrative – Alexander's wife Adelaide, their daughter Martha and the family servants, Maria and Julia.

When Otto returns he comes bearing a gift, a large antique map of the world. A surprising gift for its value alone, it meets with protest from Alexander, to which Otto responds, "Every gift is a sacrifice. If not, what kind of gift would it be?" If nothing else, it is an "active" gift that reminds us of Silverman's notion of altruism in that, eccentric though it may be, it brings the "world" into the microcosm of Alexander's family with its bourgeois philosophizing, the world whose fate will soon be precarious. This gesture, along with his penchant for collecting "incidents" and his falling down in the living room for no apparent reason, positions Otto as a holy fool who, despite his awkwardness, is unconventionally wise. This characterization will assert itself more forcefully when the film's exterior crisis precipitates the more important experience of Alexander's interior conflict.

The former occurs after Alexander falls asleep in the afternoon and then awakens to the news that nuclear war is imminent.^{li} Stunned, he finds his family and friends sitting still and mute, another “icon” reminiscent of a Bergmanesque mise-en-scene. Cryptically, he declares, “I have been waiting for this all my life.” We follow Alexander back upstairs where he checks on the sleeping Little Man and proceeds to pray “for those who haven’t given Thee a thought ... simply because they haven’t yet been truly miserable.” He then offers to give everything away, his possessions, his home, his family, even his speech, if only God will keep them all from dying. Cut to the apocalyptic imagery and then back to Alexander and Otto discussing what must be done. In keeping with his senseless wisdom, Otto explains that the war can be stopped if Alexander will sleep with the servant Maria, whom he calls a “witch.” This union, of course, will constitute her own sacrifice and will occur with what seems a certain foresight on her part, an awareness of impending apocalypse, thus substantiating Otto’s claim. Moreover, it will be an ethereal rather than a gratuitous act; when Alexander enters her home and eventually proposes intimacy, they are soon depicted hovering above ground in levitation and covered by a white sheet. Alexander returns to his family for whom normal life has resumed.

A strained conversation between Adelaide and Victor about his determination to move to Australia, however, suggests that the family’s “normality” is in fact the crisis to be averted. Knowing what remains to be done, Alexander lures the others outside and, donning a black housecoat with the yin/yang symbol on the back, sets fire to their home. It is a dramatic, if not jubilant moment, recalling the “burning, burning, burning, burning” of Eliot’s “Fire Sermon” in *The Wasteland* (*Norton* 500, ln. 308). Alexander has given

up speech and cannot communicate his intentions to the family as they come running, though as he is being carted off to an institution, the holy fool *par excellence*, the balance and catharsis inherent in the destruction are evident to the viewer. The necessity of his action is confirmed when the film cuts to Little Man back in the open landscape, watering the tree and thus fulfilling his role in ritual. And in a reversal of subject-positions, the son has regained his voice upon the father losing his own, though Little Man uses his judiciously: “In the beginning was the Word. Why is that, papa?” he asks himself.

Talking, the word (the “cadaver of psychic speech” as Derrida informs us [*Writing* 240], the dead signifier), has been replaced by the act, by doing. The ritual with which the film begins and ends heralds growth, a particular kind of growth that weathers the passage of time and suffering, that requires embodied action rather than self-serving loquacity. To the extent that he is prepared to act productively, Little Man differs from Helena in *Eyes Wide Shut*, the daughter who is preemptively embarking on a life of Barbie doll fantasy, leaving *The Sacrifice* with a more overtly affirmative dénouement. This is, perhaps, not surprising in light of Tarkovsky’s illness and his commitment to his own son, to whom the film is dedicated.

On the other hand, Tarkovsky is clearly aware of a larger commitment, to his audience and to the “world” to the extent that “Alexander offers the audience the possibility of participating in his act of sacrifice and of being touched by its results” (*Sculpting* 224). As to the nature of this participation and the experience of being “touched,” these remain abstractions that no artist (or theorist, for that matter) can clarify definitively. What can be provoked with aesthetic license, however, is the impetus to quiet one’s chatter and one’s thoughts and to watch, listen and incorporate a specific

expression of time and becoming-in-time that is inherent to certain manifestations of filmic experience: Little Man, for example, in his becoming-tree and becoming-ritualized action. In this sense, the sacrifice entails being attentive to the aesthetic “moment” and, further, following its instruction, however oblique, in the way towards liberation from the petty delusions that so easily govern us.

Of course, we are left to ponder whether Alexander’s dream is itself delusional, the obvious consequence of his mental instability being a worthless sacrifice on the part of his loved ones, the loss of their home, father, husband and friend. Maya Turovskaya, an associate and fellow filmmaker of Tarkovsky’s, clarifies this question by extending the sacrificial effort beyond the narrative/characterization of *The Sacrifice* to the director himself, as artist and self on the verge of death. She suggests that “‘The effort of resurrection’, which was the driving force in all Tarkovsky’s films, has been achieved in *The Sacrifice*” (Tarkovsky 149). She goes on to say that “for him the film was an exorcism, a gauntlet flung down to fate, an act of magic, an emanation of his artistic will to act upon reality and change it, change it by becoming a part of it and entering the world on fully equal terms” (154). So with the “archaic” and “magical” vision of cinema, the artist becomes-substance or substantial; he wills aesthetic experience into being in the face of a cancer that attests to non-being. And it is an experience, in so far as the viewer, too, is invited to follow Alexander in his awakening to what I will later call “conscious suffering,” that serves the exorcism and resurrection of what is unskillful and wise in us, alternatively. Unlike Alexander, however, we must not all consign ourselves to holy madness. Under the right circumstances, the pain can be endured with grace.

Five | The Masochistic Body

Cut to *A Thousand Plateaus*, page 151:

‘Mistress, 1) You may tie me down on the table, ropes drawn tight, for ten to fifteen minutes, time enough to prepare the instruments; 2) One hundred lashes at least, a pause of several minutes; 3) You begin sewing, you sew up the hole in the glans; you sew the skin around the glans to the glans itself, preventing the top from tearing; you sew the scrotum to the skin of the thighs. You sew the breasts, securely attaching a button with four holes to each nipple. You may connect them with an elastic band with buttonholes – *Now you go on to the second phase:* 4) You can choose either to turn me over on the table so I am tied lying on my stomach, but with my legs together, or to bind me to the post with my wrists together, and my legs also, my whole body tightly bound; 5) You whip my back buttocks thighs, a hundred lashes at least; 6) You sew my buttocks together, all the way up and down the crack of my ass. Tightly, with a doubled thread, each stitch knotted. If I am on the table, now tie me to the post; 7) You give me fifty thrashes on the buttocks; 8) If you wish to intensify the torture and carry out your threat from last time, stick the pins all the way into my buttocks as far as they go; 9) Then you may tie me to the chair; you give me thirty thrashes on the breasts and stick in the smaller pins; if you wish, you may heat them red-hot beforehand, all or some. I should be tightly bound to the chair, hands behind my back so my chest sticks out. I haven’t mentioned burns, only because I have a medical exam coming up in awhile, and they take a long time to heal’ (quoted, Deleuze and Guattari).

This passage is followed by the assertion that “this is not phantasy, it is a program.” And further still:

The BwO is what remains when you take everything away. What you take away is precisely the phantasy, and significances and subjectifications as a whole. Psychoanalysis does the opposite: it translates everything into phantasies, it converts everything into phantasy, it retains the phantasy. It royally botches the real, because it botches the BwO (151).

I quote Deleuze and Guattari at length here for two reasons. First, they present a valuable critique of psychoanalysis based on what they perceive as its relative inefficiency, if not its detrimental consequences for the analysand and perhaps the culture at large. Secondly, and by extension, what they offer in its stead is action (a “program,” however extreme), an action that is as artful as it is transgressive of the sexual boundaries that define normative subjectivity. In this chapter I want to explore further both the limitations of theoretical constructs that inform such subjectivity, along with their normative practices, and the possibilities of agency that might develop out of a theoretical and practical renewal of the real in which action occurs, to real people and real bodies. Masochism, stripped of its negative, phantasy-laden stigma, provides not only a potentially sexually-rejuvenating erotic art, but is essential, I will argue, to self-development as a “somaesthetic” enterprise.

The textual analyses that conclude the previous two chapters, on *The Body Artist* and *The Sacrifice*, though treating different circumstances in different contexts, clearly reveal the necessity of an engagement with suffering in the pursuit of self-transformation. In both cases, this engagement even takes the form of a “program” in so far as the protagonists create and execute very precise frameworks of action. To quote Deleuze once again, “individuals find a real name for themselves only through the harshest exercise in depersonalization, by opening themselves to the multiplicities everywhere

within them, to the intensities running through them” (*Negotiations* 6). The following chapters will examine texts that can function, even more directly than literature and film, as such exercise (with, of course, varying degrees of harshness). But first I shall consider some qualities of masochism as they ultimately relate to “somaesthetic” practice.

Uncomfortable Thresholds

Responding to the kind of narrative that opens this chapter in his *Perversions: The Erotic Form of Hatred*, Robert J. Stoller unsurprisingly notes how “hostility in the perverted [masochistic] act is disguised, maintained secretly in the fantasies of what one is doing to one’s partner when one is ‘victimized.’ These people have lusciously martyrish gratifications ... which convert the physical victim into psychological victor over his tormentor” (58). That his book was written in 1975 is no grounds for dismissing this argument, which puts forth the notion that masochistic experience is inherently and inevitably based upon its participants’ hostility and competitiveness, that it is perverse beyond acceptable mental health. Stoller’s view is common at the turn of the 21st century. One need only read the blurb from the Guardian that graces the cover of Anita Phillips’ *A Defence of Masochism* (1998) to get a sense of the stigma that remains attached to the phenomenon: “Don’t say I said so (what would people think?) but it’s a wonderful book” (quoted, Margaret Freely). It is precisely this undercurrent of regrettable cynicism behind the “cute” declaration that is spawned from more rigorous analyses such as Stoller’s that are quick to convert an acceptance and an extolling of pain into phantasy. The severity of Deleuze and Guattari’s critique of psychoanalysis, then,

appears justified when one considers the degree to which the latter's pronouncements have dictated the boundaries of the sexual self, its "significances" and "subjectifications."

Phillips brandishes her own critique of psychoanalysis as a practice, the aim of which, she suggests, is "to diminish suffering, to make you more comfortable in yourself, less pathological. The means to this end is talking" (*Defence* 141). Whilst such aims are undeniably valid, the obvious skepticism towards "talking" here suggests that the "means" may be less than compelling. Speech, as opposed to action; an exercise in narrative without doing. We recall Schafer's claim that "there is no self that *does* anything" (my italics) in the generation of self-narratives at the core of psychoanalytic practice. Phillips continues: "It seems to me small wonder that significant numbers of people prefer to take the ascetic road, integrating the necessity of pain into their lives, rather than the therapeutic one, by which they continually revisit their pathologies and disorders in an extended, one-sided and possibly dreary conversation" (141). In addition to the lack of embodied action, of course, the "talking cure" becomes problematic when it is propelled by a prescribed discourse, one that often fails to take into account the uses as well as the abuses of aberrancy. At best, a debilitating self-narrative may be exorcised and exchanged for another that integrates the psychoanalytic discourse rather than what Phillips identifies as asceticism into lived experience. In the aberrancy of a particular brand of asceticism, she argues, the masochistic element of which provokes numerous shades of delight and revulsion in mainstream culture, there lie the redemptions of pleasure and revolt.

In common parlance, masochism is first and foremost a sexual phenomenon and I will treat it as such before considering its semantic and practical application to the more

general project of “somaesthetic” development. Drawing from Kraft-Ebbing’s appropriation of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch’s name and sexual proclivities, and ultimately from Sacher-Masoch’s own body of literature, Deleuze, in his *Coldness and Cruelty*, makes a by now common distinction between sadism and masochism that will become crucial to a later discussion of negative Freudian impulses. The initial conflation of terms, sadomasochism (a category whose commonality is confirmed by not being tagged in Microsoft Word), is inappropriate, in so far as sadism and masochism are mutually-exclusive practices. Rather than complementing one another, as is typically assumed by the casual observer, they are opposed by virtue of their polar desires and the specific forms in which they are fulfilled. Simply put, the sadist requires an unwilling victim, whilst the masochist demands complete control over the administration of his or her pain/humiliation, going so far as to propose a written or verbal contract. Neither practice is more “real” than the other, though in the self-fashioning of masochistic experience, it is clear that the reality of the masochistic relationship is based upon consent (however one-sided in execution) between two people rather than upon victimization.

Phillips concurs with this distinction but remains conflicted in her definition of masochism. She begins with the assertion that it is “something that has to involve another person, even if the other person is only there in the imagination” (*Defense 4*). And yet, in her attempt to defend the practice, she ultimately (and, it would seem, unknowingly) disseminates its meaning(s) to account for a generalized sensibility to which everyone is inclined at some level, “partnered” or otherwise, be it that of the Christ or the artist, whom she calls a “professional” or “productive” masochist (44) in his or her ability to

utilize such impulses for aesthetic ends. I'll say more about the aesthetic of masochism and its role in the real in a moment. What matters most in her extension of the practice to include mysticism and artistry is the notion of its productivity in the face of the psychoanalytic stamp of perversion.

Deleuze distinguishes between destructive impulses and the more categorical Death Instinct, as put forth by Freud, in relation to masochism. "The former," Deleuze explains, "are actually given or exhibited in the unconscious, but always in combination with the life instincts ... so that destruction, and the negative at work in destruction, always manifests itself as the other face of construction and unification as governed by the pleasure principle" (*Masochism* 30). In other words, contrary to a position that would locate masochistic behavior solely in the realm of Thanatos, as a medium of "torment" and sadism, the masochist may be as driven by an exploration of Eros as by a desire for death, the two being inextricably linked. Thanatos alone, on the other hand, signifies "absolute negation" (30) and is therefore, I would suggest, closer to sadism in the purely destructive nature of its impulse, an impulse that ultimately targets the self as much as the (human) other.^{lii} Freud makes a similar claim when he observes that "masochism is nothing more than an extension of sadism turned round upon the subject's own self..." (*Three* 24), albeit with the rather unfortunate and now redundant merger of terms.

Phillips corroborates this relatively productive view of masochism as "a mixture of two opposing wishes, for life and for death, for the gratification of pleasure and the desire to engage with the downside ... this impossible life and death cocktail..." (*Defense* 32). Why "impossible?" Perhaps because the desire that propels sexual masochism, like all sexual impulses, is never completely sated; and because Eros cannot exist beside or

within absolute negation. Nevertheless, Phillips, as both scholar and practicing masochist, is clear about the value of “getting dirty,” as she puts it throughout her book. For my purposes, such value lies not so much in transgressing sexual boundaries as it does in embracing the “dirtiness” and “impossibility” of the real, the suffering that is inherent to lived experience, in a manner that is exceptionally creative and programmatic. In short, there is no “somaesthetics” without productive masochism.

Uncomfortable Thresholds 2

There is music of the nouveau metal variety emanating from behind a building on a corner. The explorers are in no hurry, they are celebrating, and park to seek out the origin of the sound. Behind the piercing/tattoo parlor they encounter friends lined up before a stage on which a large scaffold has been erected, chains with small, sturdy hooks dangling from the top bar. They are informed that a ceremony of sorts is about to take place. Despite the fact that they are outside in a moderately clangorous city, a quiet soon descends, the metal is replaced by something more somber, devotional. Enter a slender, shaven-head man painted in gold, stripped to his jockeys, also painted. He sits beneath the scaffold with his legs crossed, his eyes are closed, he is meditating and chanting. He sits for a very long time, though there is nothing in the way of ennui to be sensed in the audience. They have come to anticipate something extraordinary.

When he indicates that it is time, someone ties the man’s ankles together and others begin to insert steel hoops into piercings that only become apparent when stretched. First the shoulders, then the forearms, the thighs, and finally, the calves. The dirge has faded into silence. The hooks are connected to the hoops and, carefully,

someone begins to pull the chain upward so that its various tentacles are taut, the man's skin rising somewhat where it accommodates steel. He is intensely concentrated, he is lifted, an inch or so, off the stage. And the chain-pullers continue to pull, he rises to approximately three and a half feet in the air, his assistants spin him in several directions at a moderate pace, compelling many in the audience to break the astonished silence with cheers and applause. The noise people make is inappropriate, it might seem, but only from the standpoint of an unspoken decorum with which the ritual began. The reaction is perfectly sensible, for they are responding to the man's uncommon tolerance, and indeed, his pleasure in pain. And secretly or not so secretly, the people all yearn for the same.

Following this demonstration another man approaches the stage. He seems less fit than the other, his tattoos and hairstyle, the manner of his stride, indicative of a strong personality for whom appearance is all-important. He endures a similar procedure to his predecessor, though he is standing, with fewer hooks in his body, and it does not last as long. As tension is again brought to the chains, a space is opened between his heels and the stage, between the insteps and the stage, until he is balancing on tip toes and, unlike the one who went before, bleeding from the perforations in his skin. He weeps, an assistant calls it off and the tension is removed. The man is caressed by another as the audience offers applause of a different variety, a combination of great appreciation for his effort and acknowledgement of the fact that fashion will only bring him pain rather than the unique brand of pleasure instrumental to his practice.

Semantics

Does such a ritual constitute an example of masochism? According to Phillips' original definition, it does not. It ultimately involves one person ("masochistic" spectatorship is another issue altogether) and is not overtly linked to sex. On the other hand, it most certainly entails a willing engagement with pain and is presented aesthetically, as performance. Of course, one may well inquire as to what it is that is being produced in this productive masochism – one possible answer being a feeling or an awareness of oneself, of one's body/mind that is closed to most of us who are uninterested in cultivating suffering at that level. It is an awareness, I would argue, that challenges Silverman's notion of the "deferred action" of consciousness to the extent that such methodical endurance of pain precludes or dims the activity of the unconscious; this, in so far as it pushes beyond language, in keeping with which, Lacan informs us, the unconscious is structured. All that is left when the body is fully suspended and the hooks are digging into flesh, on the fine line between synthesis of synthetic and organic materials and the ripping of flesh, is likely an approximation, at the very minimum (and non-"self-strutting" in the serious practitioner), of self-consciousness, the intensity of experience that is at once painful and pleasurable and "associated," in Jean-Francois Lyotard's characterization of the sublime, "with an ontological dislocation" ("The Sublime" 252). We shall encounter an extension of this dislocation of the listening self in the next chapter.

Though it is perhaps improper to speak of the absence of neurosis and Antonin Artaud in the same context, Derrida's essay on the Theater of Cruelty sheds a surprising light on the performative (and spectatorial) marriage of "pain" and consciousness.

According to his reading, “the theater of cruelty ... would not be a theatre of the unconscious. Almost the contrary. Cruelty is consciousness, is *exposed lucidity*. “There is no cruelty without consciousness and without the application of consciousness” (my italics, *Writing* 242). The pain of stripping off social masks (the expressions that one “gives” as opposed to those that one “gives off,” in Erving Goffman’s terminology (*Presentation 2*), one’s layers of self-concern and personality, to such an extent that the “performer” is “lucid” and conscious, is cruel for the very reason that it is “exposed.” What is most important here, however, comes from Artaud’s pen, the notion that consciousness must be “applied” if it is to function within the context of his theater. The “actor” (whose performativity is by no means relegated to the stage) acts; she or he becomes an agent of productive, embodied action without the mediating filter of unconscious “language,” however painful this might be – the “triumph of pure *mise en scène*” (*Writing* 236) as Derrida puts it. Artaud’s dramatic language is, rather, a “unique language half-way between gesture and thought” (*The Theater* 89), thus suggesting a theatre practice closer to the “modern primitives” scene described above than to conventional drama.

Exceptional though it is, the theater of cruelty is real, a presentation of the real, as is the “program” spelled out by Deleuze and Guattari. Phillips offers her own “program” under the subtitle “Whiplash” in which she delineates typical gestures, postures and codes in the interplay of dominance and submission – all, she claims (and there is no reason to doubt her), from experience. Try as scholars may to enunciate the masochistic act, however, the effort is, in the end, necessarily incomplete, an embodied pleasure that defies discursive communication. As that “which can be actively accessed and positively

produced, even [when it] cannot be signified” (Bogue, “Violence” 136), the sublime, in Lyotard’s view, is pleasurable because it is always just out of reach. Doubtless, this limitation is due in part to the mere representational capacity of language and its precarious relation to the real that, in Lacan’s theory, signifies a dimension that “remains foreclosed from the analytic experience, which is an experience of speech” (*Four* 280). The real lacks in the “symbolic order, the ineliminable residue of all articulation...” (280). Lacan himself states that it “is beyond ... the insistence of the signs, by which we see ourselves governed by the pleasure principle” (53-54). In referencing Lacan in this context, I am, of course, taking a liberty with the third of his central, interconnected terms (Imaginary and Symbolic). For Lacan, the real is to be distinguished from reality that is governed by the *méconnaissance* inherent to everyday experience. What I am suggesting, on the contrary, is that the real can penetrate this reality under specific circumstances (beyond even the discomfort of the postmodern text) to the extent that the latter is charged with a recognition (as opposed to a mis-recognition) of self that is a necessary and, I would argue, logical precursor to the kind of agency that I am navigating.

On the other hand, whether experienced first-hand or translated into discourse, any sexual exchange, particularly one that unfolds according to a certain theatricality, is susceptible to (and perhaps engendering of) *méconnaissance* in so far as strong emotion fuels the Imaginary in the self/other dyad. A number of passages from each of the writers on masochism considered thus far bear this out. The unapologetically conservative Stoller, in commenting upon the contractual element of masochism, for example, claims that “the whole scenario is known (preconsciously if not consciously) to portray

fraudulent suffering” (my italics, *Perversion* 51). Phillips speaks of the “*imaginary rupturing*” (my italics *Defense* 99) of self that generates the pleasure in pain, the sensation of what Leo Bersani calls a “self-shattering *jouissance*” (39) that reminds one that one exists. Deleuze characterizes Masoch’s own sexual tendency, literary and otherwise, as equally idealistic:

what he does is to disavow and thus suspend it [the ‘world’], in order to secure an ideal which is itself suspended in fantasy. He questions the validity of existing reality in order to create a pure ideal reality, an operation which is perfectly in line with the judicial spirit of masochism. It is not surprising that this process should lead straight into fetishism (*Masochism* 33).

Fetishism, of course, being the acceptance and employment, consciously or unconsciously, of fantasy *par excellence*.

So how might we reconcile this admission of fantasy with the differentiation between “phantasy” and “program” put forward by Deleuze and Guattari at the beginning of the chapter?^{liii} How much more invested in the real is the “program” than the “phantasy” that might govern sexual, contractual masochism (and the psychoanalytic theory that “treats” it) when the “program” is so closely linked to an inverted sublimation? What is clear in this line of questioning is the degree to which the pain encountered by the sexual masochist is indeed excessive of language regardless of its precipitation by discourse, be it interior or verbalized. The “program,” then, exceeds “phantasy” when the intensity of corporeal sensation becomes only what it is, when physicality erupts in consciousness to the point of surpassing the immediacy of thought.^{liv} As DeLillo puts it in relation to Bob Flanagan, the performance artist who “drives nails into his penis ... this is just truth” (*Body* 105), his suffering far from fraudulent.

Moreover, in so far as it requires skill and is performed, it is art. And whether one is alone or coupled in the aesthetic of such a “program,” I would argue that it is a practice that demonstrates the necessity and value of suffering, the “rupturing” of self that can be followed by what Phillips calls a “refreshment or renewal” (*Defense* 41) – precisely the contents offered in Silverman’s “active gift of love,” to oneself or to another.

For the father of psychoanalysis, of course, sexual masochism remains inferior to more traditional arts that, nevertheless, have a serious drawback as media of sublimation. “Their intensity is mild,” Freud explains, “as compared with that derived from the satiation of crude and primary instinctual impulses; it [the ‘finer and higher’ art] does not convulse our physical being” (*Civilization* 26-27). This last phrase goes a long way to help distinguish between “the satiation of crude impulses” and their relatively programmatic displacement through art. For whilst my general argument is for praxis that transforms the self/body in profound ways, “convulsion” signifies a loss of control, a chaotic surrender to both internal and external forces that is antithetic to such praxis. What I hope to have demonstrated thus far is the methodical artfulness of masochistic practice that at once provokes mental, emotional and physical intensity, hardly mild, and channels that intensity in an intelligent, hyper-pleasurable activity. And yet, the “finer and higher” arts such as literature, film, music, etc. do not necessarily preclude such intensity. Here we might think of a novel such as Knut Hamsun’s *Hunger* for its sustained and agonizing psychosis; Marina de Van’s film *In My Skin*, about a woman who literally and ecstatically eats herself alive; the performance art of Franko B, who slowly bleeds himself on stage; the domestic and existential violence of Sarah Kane’s drama; (I will speak of music and various modes of becoming in the next chapter). What situates

texts/practices within a somaesthetic framework, however, is the degree to which they nurture “improved living” or productive rather than destructive becomings. Brilliant though they may be, whether the texts mentioned above satisfy this qualification is highly questionable, as is the case, I would argue, with a “program” whose *raison d’etre* is the service of “disavowal.”

Hence my use of sexual/self-mutilation masochism as metaphor for “somaesthetic” practice in which pleasure must be taken in the tremendously difficult undertaking of cultivating agency over and against those exterior and interior forces that function to impede new becomings, or rather, dictate the particular becomings that serve dominant culture. To stay with this metaphor and its psychoanalytic context a bit longer, we may consider a parallel between the Freudian, tripartite model of subjectivity and the kind of development about which I am speaking in so far as the id, ego and super-ego may, given the right circumstances and effort, fulfill their proper functions; that is, they may govern the self within their own boundaries so as to manifest a balance between Dionysian and Apollonian modalities. Ideally, the ego does not privilege one over the other. Rather, it embraces id impulses, discriminating between healthy spontaneity and destructive attachment, and heeds the super-ego without yielding to its interpellative, acculturating tendencies (ie. Freud’s “moral masochism” and “sadistic super-ego”) (*Civilization* 136). What distinguishes “somaesthetic” practice from psychoanalysis, however, is that it is first and foremost grounded in the immediacy of the body/self rather than in discourse.^{lv} And where it departs from sexual masochism is in the end to which suffering is put – not, as in the latter, to pleasure alone, but to an exceptional engagement

with the real of one's conditionality as a self, one's fragmentation and the possibility of integrating the "bits and "pieces."^{lvi}

Identifying Masochism

Thus far, the literary and filmic characters outlined here all exhibit some degree of masochism by exposing themselves (or being exposed – a significant difference) to danger for the sake of their own or other's safety and development. Obviously, the "somaesthetic" "program" that I am examining is ideally non-reactionary and entails a thoughtful embarkation upon the cultivation of agentic experience as I have characterized it. The most important question to ask regarding these characters is not necessarily why they do what they do, but to what extent does their masochism induce a similar impulse in the reader/viewer? I have argued that identification has the potential to be strong enough to shape one's perception of oneself and the other in its various manifestations. In this respect, art can serve one of its purposes – to have an impact on its consumer. The process by which this impact is executed, however, is still identification (and is thus marked by cultural codification), generating a certain dependence upon the medium of a character, for example, and the imaginary realm from which he or she emerges. The problem of identification is offset, of course, by the fact that one's experience of the text as a whole, its style, pace and duration, may locate the reader/viewer, at various points, at the center of that experience. In other words, as the text recedes into a relatively minimalist and repetitive mode of presentation, as in the case of *The Sacrifice*, the reader/viewer is foregrounded; the space of oneself has been opened, and penetrated, by the imperative of suffering.

I have argued that the further we get from language, the closer we may come to an immediate rather than a “deferred” action or perception of self. As contemporary French literature scholar Warren Motte explains, “increasingly the demand has been for an honest, direct, unadulterated experience in art, (any art), minus symbolism, minus messages, and minus personal exhibitionism” (*Small* 5). The emphasis here is on an emergent aesthetic as opposed to a “program” of self-alteration. However, when Motte engages with particular minimalist texts (that is, texts that utilize as little material, and thus convention, as possible), Toussaint’s *The Bathroom*, for example, he is inclined to align the text proper with the experience of its consumption in a way that invokes Stanley Fish and Reader Response theory. “Wherever we may turn in this text,” he asserts, “we are inescapably confronted with our own reading act, we are always watching ourselves read” (105). I have already addressed such an approach in the domains of literature (Barthes’ readerly vs. writerly texts) and film (Alexander’s rejection of “words, words, words!” and subsequent call for action in *The Sacrifice*). The defining characteristic of this approach, regardless of medium, is the discomfort that it inevitably provokes. Unlike most of the foundational theory that occupies the first two chapters of this study, however, the “somaesthetic” practices ultimately seek and foster a discomfort that is hardly an end in itself. Moreover, such practices are born of subtraction rather than addition. In the following chapter I shall consider a third medium, music, certain practices of which take us further in the direction of what I hesitantly call minimalism and the “exposed,” listening self.

Six | “Mark the Music:” Microsound and Self-Knowledge

You love jazz, soul, and late seventies pop, yet insist on going with your lover to concerts of atonal modern music that leave you excited but defeated – it is not just intellectual pretension, but a longing for the sublime sense of exile of that super-rational absolutism (Phillips, *Defense* 34).

“Excited but defeated.” To clarify, we might say that such defeat is a common response to the failure of cultural products (or indeed, life) to meet certain expectations. We may find ourselves lost in unfamiliar terrain, reluctant nomads on the page, the screen or in an abstract sound environment, exiled from what is easy and somehow precious. The excitement and sublimity, on the other hand, erupt when we sense that there is something valuable in our misdirection and follow through on the peculiar impulse to continue wandering across foreign planes of intensity. We are moved by a particular type of “longing,” one that, by virtue of its fearfulness, is to be distinguished from conventional pleasure or wish fulfillment. This longing draws us towards liminal experience, to “the edge of what is possible,” as Susan Broadhurst puts it (*Liminal* 12) -

what is possible in and around our bodies, our reading, viewing, thinking, feeling and listening selves. Simple pleasures don't always suffice in the postmodern world.

And yet, thoughtful, engaged simplicity is sometimes the most effective vehicle for provocation. Contrary to relatively baroque manifestations of aesthetic practice, a minimalist art speaks or screams with few words, it visualizes with an economy of images, sounds the inaudible, and in so doing creates a space in which the other can (and indeed, is compelled to) participate as an active reader, viewer, listener. As should be clear at this point, such participation, in the form of aesthetic practice/consumption, often poses a challenge to identity and the physicality with/in which it functions. As Deleuze and Guattari put it, "music is never tragic, music is joy. But there are times it necessarily gives us a taste for death; not so much happiness as dying happily, being extinguished" (*Thousand* 299). The traditional "refrain" of music and self alike may thus be undone, deterritorialized by what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as music proper, "a creative, active operation" (300). Composer Morton Feldman argues that "where in life we do everything we can to avoid anxiety, in art we must pursue it" (*Give* 32); and elsewhere: "art is a crucial, dangerous operation we perform on ourselves. Unless we take a chance, we die in art" (47). Art as surgery, performative self-alteration. In this paradigm of action, less certainly constitutes more in so far as there is, perhaps, no greater anxiety or risk than in being confronted with oneself in the spare and relatively precise mirror of a "text."^{lvii}

But music for the time doth change his nature. / The man that hath no music in himself, nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds, / Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils, / The motions of his spirit are dull as night, / And his affections dark as Erebus, / Let no such man be trusted: mark the music (Shakespeare, *Merchant* 101).

More than any other medium, music generates collectivity amongst people in the form of political and aesthetic movements. It mobilizes, nourishes and informs large-scale communities, entire generations. This is especially so in the context of 20th/21st century developments in technology and mass communication. But music also maintains a unique position in relation to the individual listener, unique in so far as the auditory sense is not only the first and the last to inform the human organism, but is also the most immediately fulfilled, at least in terms of aesthetic phenomena (the pleasure of such fulfillment covering a vast range of possibilities). Unlike cinema, for example, in which sight generally dominates but is accompanied by sound, music typically accesses one sense alone; and unlike photography or painting, it is fluid, not static, and therefore more adaptable to new contexts, performed or otherwise (the concert hall, club, living room, car...), and thus, new subjectivities. Again, I am not interested in resurrecting the hackneyed debate concerning the privileging of one sense (or medium) over the other. Nor do I wish to disparage a given genre in the vein of Allan Bloom or Theodore Adorno. My point, however, is that the immediate fulfillment of music, specific instances of music, is what we might identify as its exceptional capacity to orient attention and concentration, to change one's "nature," with a *minimal investment of language*. I am speaking here, of course, about instrumental music, or music in which the human voice is used for its tonal or atonal, as opposed to its discursive qualities. Unless one reads a score along with listening to a composition, the physical, aural impact of certain musics elides signification. Indeed, in the music that I will consider for this chapter as conducive to "somaesthetic" practice, the triadic sign (including signifier and signified) is minimized (if not eliminated altogether) to obscurity.

Numerous philosophers concur with the notion that music holds a distinctive place in the experience, aesthetic or otherwise, of body/self in relation to representational media. Plato praised it for its “mathematical rather than imitative relationship to the higher realm of forms” that precludes it from being “dangerously deceptive” (Jay, *Downcast* 27); Rousseau lauded its capacity to achieve “immediacy” (92); “Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Adorno ... heard in music the quintessential art form” (265); and for Sartre, “its disincarnation undoes all identificatory projects, forbids all (auto)-mimetic reference” (quoted, 281). Of course, Plato would not have foreheard, to use a necessary neologism, what has come to be known as popular music, from Wagner to diva pop, and the extent to which it can function as propaganda (for the State, for the bloated romanticism of would-be lovers and the broken-hearted). And yet, the “quintessential” medium has manifested itself in strikingly innovative and philosophically challenging ways, in tandem, one could argue, with its general popularization. Where this innovation is most compelling and, in fact, distanced from mimesis, is where it is most minimal, most silent and, ironically, most embodied.

The purpose of this chapter is not to present an extensive history of avant-garde music since the first early human produced, and enjoyed, a non-utilitarian sound. Rather, as with previous discussions of literature and film, I shall use this space to explore examples of texts that ground one in the immediate experience of their use.^{lviii} On the other hand, it is necessary to clarify what I mean by minimalism given the term’s many connotations, from mere reductionism to sublime apotheosis. Most studies of musical minimalism begin with a collective of composers in the 1960’s and 70’s including La Monte Young, Phillip Glass, Steve Reich and Terry Reilly, to name a few. Despite the

fact that none of these composers have adopted the label to characterize their music, it persists nonetheless as a term used to describe what typically amounts to repetition rather than spaciousness in composition. To use the analogy of abstract painting, as is often done in the theorization of experimental music, the minimalism of this period is closer to the linear, colorful elegance of a Mondrian than to the ethereal “White on White” canvas of Malevich. In Reich’s *Octet* (1979), for example, short melodies are played on various instruments (piano, clarinets, flute, viola, etc.), repetitively, and layered to create complex tapestries of sound as the composition progresses. Transitions offset a given trajectory but rarely break the momentum. A flurried pattern of notes rushes forward only to be replaced by a new pattern that takes its time to develop. The piece concludes at a dead stop, leaving no question as to where composition ends and ambient sound begins (again) in relation to the listener’s attention.

In this critic’s subjective opinion, *Octet* is beautiful. It is celebratory, life-affirming, it glows. But it is hardly minimal. Earlier critics and non-critics alike charged the repetitive quality of such music with the tag of minimalism in opposition to what they understood to be the inherent dynamism of more traditional composition. Repetition may limit the number of notes being played but it does not necessarily minimize the “words, words, words!” of sound by opening the auditory environment to silence. It is through the composition of, or more specifically, out of silence, I would argue, that musical minimalism has arrived and continues to arrive at the intersection of body/self and the aesthetic of our first and last sense. In keeping with Lynch’s obscure admonishment that closes *Muholland Drive*, I will proceed with an exploration of silence as aesthetic praxis.

The Clamor of Silence

But first, noise. Masami Akita's Merzbow project locates its most overt conflation of sound, body/self and the artfulness of suffering in his two collections known as *Music for Bondage Performance* (1995). Track one on disc 1 entitled "Hara-Kiri Video" utilizes repetition in the relatively short space of three minutes and five seconds to the end of sounding the performative art of traditional Japanese bondage. Rather than sample and thus document the bondage act, Akita offers a sonic interpretation, or presentation, that we might identify as the grisly underside of Reich's *Octet* – its off-rhythm kick-drum that beats throughout, its pulsing walls and sweeps of electronic feedback noise, the revving of a "drill," an "airplane engine" preparing for take-off, and like *Octet*, its abrupt cut that disallows an easy transition into a less provocative sonic environment. This is a piece that is clearly not beyond signification in so far as it references a particular act and does so with an exceedingly communicative palette of sounds. However, it both embraces and induces a particular, experiential form of suffering that might be called "somaesthetic" by virtue of the artistry it displays and to which it corresponds. Moreover, in confronting the listener with such density of sound, it, perhaps ironically, introduces a listening process that is not unlike that provoked by silence, the corollary of absolute spaciousness being an over-saturation of noise that provokes interiority in the face of an immense wash of sound.^{lix}

Of course, Aldous Huxley was doubtless right to identify the modern era as the "Age of noise" that perpetuates an "assault against silence" (*Perennial* 275), an age whose inevitable sonic extremity is either high or no volume. Nevertheless, noise, thoughtful, productive noise, I would argue, can be as somaesthetically compelling as

silence despite its general implication in the proliferation of what Huxley calls the “prefabricated din” (276) that makes its way into our technologically-dependent lives. Barring escape into a desert, it probably behooves those of us who compromise sonic serenity for the sake of enjoying the pleasures and potentialities of civilized life to accept, and more importantly, to work creatively with noise as does Akita and others like him who manage to turn the “assault” back onto the cultural sound generators that both enrich and degrade lived experience. The primary difference, however, between confrontation with the two extremes, aesthetically valuable or not, is that noise can only be tolerated to a limited degree and is, however inevitable, unnecessary to the maintenance of a healthy life. Relative silence, on the other hand, is crucial to sleep and to the diverse processes of uncluttering the mind that aid in analytical and conceptual thought and quotidian functioning alike. Obviously, our music can support or encumber these processes.

Microsound

Silence is the universal refuge, the sequel to all dull discourse and all foolish acts, a balm to our every chagrin, as welcome after satiety as after disappointment; that background which the painter may not daub, be he master or bungler, and which, however awkward a figure we may have made in the foreground, remains ever our inviolable asylum, where no indignity can assail, no personality disturb us (Thoreau, *Portable* 226).

It is unlikely that Thoreau, like Plato, could have envisioned or “foreheard” the use to which silence has been put in the concert hall or, more often, the club, the gallery, the loft apartment, the marriage between technology and avant-garde music having since been so deftly consummated. Drawing from a number of genres (the labels of which tend to be equally functional and conditional) – Futurism, *musique concrète*, modern composition, electro-acoustic, techno, ambient – the term microsound (or “lower-case”

music) has come to signify a musical manifestation of the “sequel” to discourse that clearly prompted Thoreau to value the solitary life. Like its forerunners, microsound shares an affinity for technology as a musical tool in and of itself and is largely dependent upon technological advances that allow increasingly “microscopic” excavations of sound that can be put to use in composition. Both the generation of sonic material and the methods of such composition depart from more traditional genres in that they are conceived and born out of software. Processes such as filtering, granular synthesis and high precision EQ that opens a vast range of frequencies, amongst many others, make it possible to extract from any sound source what is generally buried under the surface of other musics and to compose in programs that open the compositional palette visually, manually and sonically.

Others have written in detail about the specific technologies and, by extension, the political implications of microsound and its general dimensions (composition, performance, etc.).^x My intention here is to examine the role of relative silence in microsound as a practice. Positioned in front of a laptop and/or various bits of analogue (non-digital) gear, or between headphones, listening, the self that listens experiences an ironic embodiment. On one hand, he or she is engaged with technology that precludes physical, dramatic action, the kind of action that one associates with sweeping gestures at the piano, on the (air) guitar or cello; he or she is rather more still, a relatively passive figure in relation to his or her acoustically-inclined counterpart. On the other hand, however, the play of silence and near audibility that fuels such stillness opens the possibility of becoming-listener, whose analogue in the yogi gives us some idea as to the

nature of his or her action, her self-observation, his active participation in the countless thoughts and sensations that react to small and large sounds.

The embodiment inherent to microsound as praxis is ironic in so far as it is grounded in the paradox, also known to the meditating yogi, of passive activity. Maurice Blanchot identifies this phenomenon in relation to writing, the “silence” of the writing self that temporarily divests that self of itself; the one who “has nevertheless maintained within his effacement the authority of a power, the decision to be silent, so that in this silence what speaks without beginning or end can take on form, coherence and meaning” (“The Essential...” 70). Though I will ultimately argue that the value of any aesthetic practice is largely dependent upon such effacement, the composer is perhaps most immediately aware of the silence into which he or she must inevitably descend if a relatively selfless “authority” beyond the ego-centered self is to materialize.

“What speaks without beginning or end” may be understood as a process of subjective unfoldment. However, it is a process that assumes “form, coherence and meaning” only in the wake of a *decision* to act, to create – a composition, a dance, a novel – out of silence rather than the ego-centered impulse to locate one’s voice in aesthetic endeavor. The process of such development, then, may be fuelled by silence, by active passivity, rather than by the strengthening of personality and identity. The active, silent self is nomadic to the extent that this process is aligned with timelessness, a series of immediate “nows,” to evoke Toussaint; the nomad wanders across borders that are not without worth, ephemeral though they may be, produces transient objects and ideas, becomes-other (a “new self”) in silence. He or she discovers the power of quietly

breaking down walls between “split” personalities and other dichotomies that are themselves ephemeral. In this process, the self emerges through erasure.

Erasure and amalgamation. As Ronald Bogue claims, in his insightful Deleuzian reading of contemporary underground metal, “for Deleuze and Guattari, all deterritorialization proceeds via a process of becoming-other, a passage between entities or categories that sets them in metaphoric disequilibrium” (“Violence” 96). Microsound functions in precisely this respect, as a musical becoming-other through software processing, the interpenetration of conventionally digital territorializations (the incidental and unavoidable noise of computers, for example) and “new” music. Through this relative silence, the listening self confronts the potential of a becoming-silence, of being at once erased and transformed via a particular plane of intensity. As Deleuze explains, “becoming is that which subtends the trajectory, as intensive forces subtend motor forces” (*Essays* 65). A “trajectory” of silence invites, with “intensive force,” a new becoming.

It is an exceptional moment. I shall quote Bogue at length to further examine how Deleuze is relevant to a consideration of this moment in its passage from one plane of experience to another:

Usually the virtual domain of becoming and self-differentiating difference escapes us, but in moments of disequilibrium and disorientation we gain access to that realm. Then we encounter a world not of discrete objects, fixed coordinates and chronometric time, but of flows and fluxes, topological spaces and floating durations. Entities within this virtual domain may be characterized solely by ‘pure relations of speed and slowness between particles’ and by ‘pure affects,’ or powers of affecting and being affected by other elements. The time of the virtual is not that of Chronos, or regularly measured time, but that of Aeon, a time like that of an infinitive, ‘to swim,’ ‘to sleep,’ a becoming that is unfixed and non-pulsed, unfolding in no specifiable direction and in relation to no clear coordinates (97).

Moments of “disorientation,” or, as I am calling it, suffering, impinge upon our auditory comfort, reorienting our notions of music, sound and listening. A potentially productive, liminal space thus enters the fold of our experience into which we are invited, where “particles” of sound and time mingle to defamiliarize the other, to affect a new domain of experience, “sonic bodies without organs, palpable planes of consistency that render perceptible what usually escapes perception [digital eruptions, trans-audible frequencies, the noise of a body unaware of itself, language] ...” (97). We might recall the Aeon time of *The Body Artist* here (or of Feldman’s work for that matter), of a performative becoming “alive in time” that holds the prospect, and the danger, of confronting the “new.” As in Lauren Hartke’s aesthetic engagement with loss, there surfaces in the infinitive a “virtual” difference, of sound and its audience.

Of course, with Silverman we may be wary of a self becoming subsumed by another and the eradication of that subject’s difference in a thoughtless display of omnivorous colonization. As I have suggested, however, Deleuze and Guattari are quick to point out that not every becoming is productive or healthy. The becoming-drug addict, for example, seeks fulfillment in chaos, an intoxicated “scribble” on the body “effacing all lines” of himself or herself (*Thousand* 344). He or she pursues a BwO that is “cancerous,” that serves the imbalance and “absolute negation” of *thanatos* over *eros*. Sound may become a dim mish mash of inattention. So again, like Lauren, or the productive masochist, the conscientious microsound composer employs “a maximum of calculated sobriety in relation to the disparate elements and the parameters ... a sober gesture, an act of consistency, capture, or extraction that works in a material that is not meager but prodigiously simplified, creatively limited, selected” (344-45). “Sobriety”

and restraint. Becoming-silence, the composer/listener works in conjunction with transformed sound to facilitate the necessary effacement and reconfiguration of the sounding-self, albeit in accord with new coordinates that are quite possibly “unclear” and always already susceptible to reterritorialization. Such is the qualification, it would seem, of our gestures towards self-“exposure” and liberation from counterproductive territorializations, despite their ingenious simplicity and quietude.

But what does it mean exactly to compose or listen out of silence, and thus to inaugurate one’s self-effacement, in the general context of the microsound aesthetic? The latter began by plundering all sound, all noise, particularly that associated with technological/computer failure, in order to reduce it to extremities and thus utilize the detritus of sonic history in much the same way that Walter Benjamin stripped photography, and indeed, History itself, of auratic facades.^{ixi} Without the familiar signifiers of traditional structure and instrumentation, then, gaps were forged to signify anew, in multiple rather than in monolithic forms, within the specific context of the listening/composing subject, itself multiplicitous and more or less quietly aware of nebulous social constructions. As microsound has evolved, certain of its strains seem to have returned to the “pure” silence out of which, arguably, they came – John Cage’s *4’33*. It is here where we must begin a discussion of microsound as “somaesthetic” praxis in so far as Cage’s (in)famous contribution leveled, and continues to level, the aural field, so to speak, and created a space in which music could at once eradicate and “change the nature” of the listener/composer.

Like staring into Lacan’s mirror, a performance of *4’33*, which entails the performer sitting at a piano and opening and closing the keyboard cover to indicate

classical “movements” for 4 minutes and 33 seconds, confronts one with a “view” of oneself. And crucially, performatively, it does so without language. In this moment, free from the din of words, noise and colonizing imagery, “I am.” And yet, the silence is not deceptive. It carries the potential to reveal the fragmentation of thought, the bodily sensations vying for attention. In this silence, misrecognition is a potentiality rather than an existential inevitability. We are adults after all. And as the silence persists in what can be an extraordinarily long and intense four minutes and thirty-three seconds, a shift can take place, a coming into being of concentration, and more, an awakening to the self that listens. For Cage, “new music ... [is] not an attempt to understand something that is being said, for, if something were being said, the sounds would be given the shapes of words. Just an attention to the activity of sounds” (*Silence* 10). Just an attention to sounds that reverberate against the quieted self, indeed, the sound of that self listening. Such an intensification of attention has an ethical as well as an aesthetic component. As Deleuze explains, “the ethics of intensive quantities has only two principles: affirm even the lowest, do not explicate oneself” (qtd, Evens, “Sound” 183). The lowest, in the case of *4'33*, refers to the overt absence of notes that coincides with the effacement (or imperceptibility) of the performing self, an aesthetic process or “moment” whose ethical dimension is such by virtue of its permeability, its decidedly postmodern ethos that downplays absolutism.

On the other hand, once the field is leveled, there is nothing more to do than to create, construct. Even Cage proceeded to work with audible sound in the manner of what he calls “purposeful purposelessness or a purposeless play” (*Silence* 12). He made the point with *4'33*, doubtless one of many that endures, that all sound is music. All

listening has a musical function. Duchamp made a similar point with the found object of a urinal, Warhol with his soup can, each stressing the legitimacy of the quotidian and, perhaps more importantly, one's perception of what is otherwise overlooked or overheard. In subsequent epochs, the "author" has re-asserted himself or herself in alignment with the "power" to be *relatively* effaced.

Against the background of silence, the microsound composer produces a minimalism of sonic activity that is typically as close to 4'33 as one can get before falling into the snare of a political or philosophical (and eventually pedestrian) message. He or she "says" nothing in a given sonic and environmental context (and he or she is saying it, as Cage would declare). However, the "activity of sounds," at its best and most conscientiously orchestrated, is indeed purposeful. Bernhard Günter's critically-acclaimed oeuvre, including his piece "un lieu à un effacé, 2eme partie" (1999), offers sonic excursions through the threshold of relative silence with microscopic sounds, deliberate but subtle gestures. Richard Chartier's composition, "How Things Change" (2002), a tribute to Feldman, both reflects an exemplary aesthetic of silence and locates itself within a historical context, in relation to a predecessor. Chartier's music in general might be said to straddle the fence between Feldman and Cage's 4'33, exploring as it does the qualities of duration and silence. This particular composition both complements and departs from Günter's "un lieu...", each piece exemplifying two (not always mutually-exclusive) modalities, the acoustic and the digital.

Bernhard Günter's Effacement

The title of Günter's composition alone is indicative of a number of inter-related themes explored in this study: self-effacement or "becoming-imperceptible," the gesture of recognizing or cultivating something out of nothing, the aesthetics of minimalism. What is effaced in or with a piece such as "un lieu..." is the safety of linear, non-abstract composition and thus the musical field that is conventionally territorialized by expressivity, by the affective cogito of the composer. In the aesthetic opening of this field, in its deterritorialization, its ultimate starkness, there is produced a something. It is a relative silence in so far as the becoming is indeed productive, its movement inevitably *towards* or *away from* silence without succumbing to a cliché that makes a gimmick of Cage's sublime four minutes and thirty-three seconds.

Remaining at a volume that necessitates either headphone use or a loud stereo, "un lieu..." opens with woody, acoustic scrapes and crackles that may or may not be at the hands of a person.^{lxiii} These sounds eventually give way to a repetitive, insectoid flickering that itself fades into complete silence, only to re-emerge 14 seconds later accompanied by what could pass for the low rumblings of a short-wave radio without voices. An even lower tone fades up out of the distant white noise, a quiet "thundering" of reverb, before the sound cuts back to silence. Thus begins what might be identified as the second "movement" in which the "wood" scrapes return, along with the juxtaposition of "forest life" and remote "industry." This section is comparatively dense, highlighted by "reverse cymbal" tones and yet another, higher pitched tone that levitates the composition, from organic earth to ether, before a second abrupt cut forges a descent into a final few seconds of the silence out of which, one may intuit, the music has arisen.

Richard Chartier's Change

“How Things Change” (also an apt title given the vicissitudes of subjectivity) is less acoustic and more digital. It is even more quiet, slower in its pacing. It opens with a shimmer of sound, the faintest resonance of a distant event from which all lower frequencies, relative to the human ear, have been removed. This is followed by the slow fade-up of a midrange drone, barely perceptible. A more audible bass swell lands in the sparse territory of the drone and is repeated approximately every 25 to 30 seconds. There eventually begins a segment of the composition that is most “musical” in so far as it introduces two sustained notes that move from one to the other (E to D). The midrange drone is left to fade out to the point of complete silence, a silence that is quickly occasioned by a high frequency sine tone lasting for 15 seconds. The repeating bass swells that had dropped out prior to the silence return, as does the initial “shimmer.” The midrange drone fades back up to its initial volume and is soon accompanied by an even lower bass that pans slowly from left to right. The E to D notes are repeated once. As the D fades out, the pulse of the lower bass oscillation is left to conclude, until, quite surprisingly, a final bass swell closes the piece.

From these (inevitably reductive) descriptions, it is clear that silence is a relative term. Only once in “How Things Change,” and at three points in “un lieu...” are the compositions without audible sound, and even then the silence cannot be said to be absolute. As Cage has famously asserted, there is never complete silence, to the extent that the listening body itself produces constant “noise.” This notion brings us back to the overriding argument that microsound (and the two pieces under consideration here in

particular) can function as a “somaesthetic” practice, distinguished from total sensory deprivation in that the relative silence is composed and thus operates as an aesthetic “guide” in the experience of oneself throughout the duration of the composition, be it as live performance or a recording. As its *modus operandi*, the quietude of microsound guides the experience of listening; first, perhaps, to the sonic landscape, however minimal, on the exterior of the listening self, and secondly, to that which can persist with tremendous force, however minimal, in the interior psyche. Whether oriented by low bass swells or acoustic, woody scrapes, or “nothing” at all, the process of such listening may eventually fold in on itself, so that the two points of concentration or observation overlap, the listening self at once centered and deterritorialized in the “now” of the auditory moment.

Uncomfortable Thresholds 3

At a café that is only barely conducive to micro-sounds and the spaces that punctuate them, the audience is surprisingly quiet and receptive considering the degree to which the venue is public rather than private, the division between which hinging upon, in this case, esoteric knowledge (of the music and the quality of listening it entails) as opposed to a bigoted exclusivity. The listeners sit with their eyes closed or focused intently on the performer behind a Powerbook.

Soft tones emanate from speakers and then fade back into laptop circuitry and the embodied silence from which they came, the room and its inhabitants left in the fullness of silence. Out of this arises another sound, a small crackling that emits the slight volume of its own eventual disappearance as it evolves into an additional nothingness, another

silence, before being replaced by a relatively melodic fabric of tones. This last transition takes place well after four minutes and thirty-three seconds.

But not before an extra-musical deterritorialization enters the fold. A man crosses into the performance space, through a door that opens between gradations of music, coffee makers and chatter on one side, relative silence on the other. A man who has been drinking enters the hushed space, looks at the people, their reverence, and proceeds to infiltrate with signification outside music and listening. He opens his mouth and speaks. He asks, “what’s going on in here?” He speaks with a lilting intonation, his words nonetheless powerful arrows through the quietude, and pointed, though he has no idea, at the performer. The latter pauses before glancing up, as though contemplating good versus evil, and reciprocates. “A concert.”

The man apologizes and seeks refuge in the adjoining room. His astonishment continues in the form of words exchanged with embarrassed employees, who do the best they can to contain his persistent commentary that pushes through the door just as the music proper begins its ascent to crescendo. The space in which listeners listen is undeniably disturbed until a tacit, collective agreement is assumed regarding the reclamation of solace in certain sound. At which point the man returns, still inebriated, but amenable to the circumstances. He introduces himself as a stand-up comic and thanks the performer once the speakers become slowly, and finally, silent.

The words are mostly a nuisance, in their volume, their lack of thoughtfulness, their pungent alcoholism. And yet, like the drunken Buddhist teacher whose pedagogy is perversely served by the grape, this man offers a statement that cuts through educated criticism and polite accolades alike. In his cultural and physical distance from the music,

his estrangement from what it can mean to *hear* what is at once the failure and the victory of technology, he claims, “man, it’s like church in there.” These words, uninformed and irreverent, speak to his wisdom. He gets it. He grasps the function and the potential of the process. It is like a sacred space, a *temenos*, where the musicality of silence at its best breeds contemplation, participation and insight, as opposed to a “colony,” however pleasurable and engaging in its own right such a space may be.

What “speaks [in this space] without beginning or end” is a process of becoming-silence, to be followed, naturally, inevitably, by noise. However, composer and listeners alike do not simply and necessarily look back in a deferred action to a quiescent, aesthetic moment. Rather, they may retain the reward of their processes, the memory of self-knowledge that, like Mircea Eliade’s hierophany, is always already awaiting re-visitation. The shock of listening.

Liminal Reductionism

Edwin Prévost, well-known percussionist in the experimental ensemble AMM, has a lot to say about silence:

Moments of significant silent serenity are only ever achieved after some kind of catharsis. And experience of presence is most effectively brought into focus through attentiveness. Reductionism [proffered by such musicians as Radu Malfatti and Taku Sugimoto] seems to be trying to produce these sublime moments in pre-packaged bite-sized chunks. And (unconsciously?) the musicians wedded to this fetishizing of silence are in fact tapping its power and effect. The resultant quietist drone seems to be trying, as it were, to short circuit the path towards satori – without having to go through all the practices and changes necessary for enlightenment. This concerns me because it is all clearly at odds with any developmental or processive approach to music-making and its attendant philosophy of becoming. With reductionism you are – or you are led to think that you are – already there. And I note with regret that even with this new hierarchy of creative precedent there is still no overt allusion to the social implications of this aesthetic (*Minute* 38).

That “reductionism” is characteristic of microsound is without question. The anecdote above suggests an experience of “reduced” music that is disrupted only by a voice foreign to its relatively silent trajectory, a musical moment that some may have encountered as “sublime” and one individual in particular finds “religious.” As its own form of catharsis or developmental becoming, the silence of this microsound event, contrary to Prévost’s claims, is in need of no build-up. Its invitation of “presence” and “attentiveness” is not conditional upon a theatrical catastrophe of sound to precede, and justify, whatever sublimity it might have offered.^{lxiii} Indeed, it is only when such a challenge is presented to the performer/audience, as a moment that is not altogether unfruitful, that the “path towards satori” (a state of enlightenment in the Zen tradition) is re-routed, the becoming-silence broken. The liminal moment of interiority that may be prompted by certain musical events does not require noise. Rather, like formal meditation, it develops over and beyond normative experiences of silent time.

“Liminal performance,” according to Broadhurst, “is not unique or separate from the social; in fact, it can be seen as an experimental extension of that sphere” (12). This point may seem obvious, though the intersection of performativity and self-development or self-alteration being constituted by the social as it is is not without its problems, as Prévost points out. For example, in the case of microsound, the “experimental extension” of the social sphere is one of relative solitude. In other words, the social is stretched to accommodate the various, isolated subjectivities to which such a performance can give birth, subjectivities that might otherwise be subsumed into a collective, loquacious, social

self. Relative silence, the silence of microsound, can be detrimental to this self. It deterritorializes the “social body” with micro-gestures and the sonic spaces in between.

On the other hand, given the austere quietude that characterizes much of this music, the social need not be invaded. Günter’s and Chartier’s compositions, for example, tend best to be served by the use of headphones in order that one be able to hear as much as possible – certain frequencies that may otherwise be inaudible through stereo speakers. Certainly it is under such conditions that the microsound composer generally works, in solitude, away from the noise, other selves, friends or drunkards. And like most experienced artists for whom recognition by/in the social is, at certain points, imperative, he or she “is solitary not because she is rejecting friendship but because she is seeking a different kind of friendship, the aim of which is not companionship but blessing” (Hix, *Spirits* 58). The “experimental extension” of the social, the liminal thrust of microsound into the ears of one or many, then, is first and foremost the extension of a gift that “blesses” with the prospect of what composer Pauline Oliveros calls deep listening – a deepened listening to ourselves, our bodies, as in a sacred gathering place, but without words. Though its nod towards the social may not always be overt, microsound is finally a music of community.

In this respect we are not very far from Silverman’s “active gift of love” - the “conscious” intensity of the artist’s decision to create, and thus to “bless” the listener, ideally, in a mutual self-effacement that is paradoxically constitutive of agency and “authority.” Here there is self and no self, as the Zen practitioner might say. It is an easy claim to make, an easy philosophy to write out, to think or speak, though embodied practice inevitably proves more difficult.

Seven | The “Somaesthetic” Turn: Becoming-Self

“Everything” that is other, as Silverman has instructed, can be treated with the gift of “love,” assuming that one is prompted accordingly. But here we must confront the problematic of esotericism, of an art or a program that, though potentially capable of actuating a process of “loving” transformation, raises questions of accessibility, especially in the example of the relatively obscure text or isolated performance piece.^{lxiv} The issue is further complicated by the question of will. The subject must first *choose* to read the novel, attend the microsound performance, or watch the subversive film before a productive becoming can be instigated. One must be in such a position as to be aware of these possibilities, not to mention being able to afford participation. What ultimately underlies the condition of every single human being, regardless of subject-position on the line somewhere between “Modernity’s Man” and “Society’s Being,” however, is the impulse to “live well,” whatever form this may take. It is a simple observation (we all breathe, desire and consume to the best of our abilities), but one worth making, for it asks, in all of its simplicity, what is perhaps the most important question that this text can

ask – who or what, in the ongoing “procession of delegates,” does or chooses to do anything?

With this question in mind, we may assume that the accessibility and viability of *any* praxis (artistic or otherwise) is relative to the capacity and the willingness of one to adopt its instruction. Willingness is manifested as the common desire, in this case, to improve the quality of life, to “stretch tensors” through agency beyond conventional subjectivities. Capacity, on the other hand, is more complicated. If, for example, the subject is constituted by a series of responses to external stimuli, be they in the form of ideology, visual or other sensorial modes of ideality, she or he is, in fact, entirely incapable of making any choice whatsoever. For every “choice” is relative to the habituated response to a given circumstance. Thus, the notion of agency becomes superfluous unless, of course, allowance is made for the possibility of instances that are comparatively unclouded by identification. Granting this allowance, willingness (or will) can be expressed but only in isolation from other, more frequently identified expressions. A primary goal of a “somaesthetics,” then, could be to address the above question by offering means by which instances of “unclouded” consciousness may be observed, extended and incorporated into daily experience of oneself and all that is presumably other.

Most of the “somaesthetic” texts that are central to this study have been enjoyed (or denounced) by many people throughout the world. With few exceptions, their creators cannot claim the same degree of esotericism fueling their work as, for example, Ottinger’s *Bildnis einer Trinkerin*, analyzed by Silverman in *The Threshold of the Visible World*. So far the texts here stand as tools that are largely accessible to a mass public,

even if their “somaesthetic” value requires what might be called “writerly” skills of perception and attention to paradoxical manifestations of effacement.

Where words, visuals and music are calmed, however, in the corporeal and meta-corporeal space of a becoming-silence, there is “self.” It may be nothing, it may be something, but it is, for all intents and purposes, there, here, a material phenomenon. This “self,” according to the equally obscure and infamous twentieth-century figure, G. I. Gurdjieff, is a combination of learned behavior and fundamental “matter” that is easier to lose than it is to cultivate. A “self,” like a text, is entirely capable of being understood objectively, asserts Gurdjieff, (without the filter of identity and subject-position) if only in terms of its bare constituents or functions; in silence, these become apparent. The general action of the self/text is made clear through the misted screen of words and noise, that which clogs perception, reducing perception to the always already represented. But the objective observation is not simply deferred after the fact. It is the fact, the memory of action and movement, of the moment-in-process just prior to memory. I am reading this, it says, paradoxically, without words. Viewing, listening.

Along with the examples of aesthetic practice already discussed, the Gurdjieff Work, as it is called, exemplifies one amongst many possibilities of confronting the self that it, with many postmodern theories, finds in disarray. Its place near the conclusion of this text, however, is hardly indiscriminate. For unlike other practices, here the confrontation between self and subjective properties that is the *raison d'être* of the Work is approached *directly*. Not only does this Work recognize and interrogate the other (as human being, but more crucially, as personal, habitual emotion, thought or sensation), it addresses the immediate perception of and identification with what is other. Thus the

“reconstruction of immediate experience” is, quite literally, given the space to unfold, a space previously occupied by the identifying proclivity as characterized by Lacan, et al. Such a confrontation, as I will demonstrate, stands as an example *par excellence* of the action necessary to the fulfillment of an ethics of selfhood in theory and in practice.

Traditional texts, even one so potentially provocative as a blood-ridden body performance (such as those by Bob Flanagan or Franko B, whose performance often entails a literal bloodletting, for example), are, I would argue, limited in their capacity to submit the subject to the reality of his or her fundamental misrecognitions *in a manner that endures on the outer margins of the aesthetic experience*. Whilst it is not my intention to subvert the efforts of previous chapters, it is important to recognize the crucial step that is being taken in addressing a “somaesthetic” praxis that makes the self itself the subject of observation and thus, the text. For without direct observation of oneself, of the instantaneous interpellative moments, seemingly infinite in the course of one’s life, whatever is learnt in the aesthetically-inspired event will likely fail to endure as an *ongoing* line of resistance against such moments.

The Gurdjieff Work is not art per se. It does not present an object to be commodified beyond the publications that more or less accurately present its systemization. Nor is it performative in the sense that an audience (an other) is arranged to participate in the interpretation of the Work. It does, on the other hand, function as a “somaesthetic” in that its practice applies what could be called an aesthetic of consciousness to bodily experience. Much like Shusterman’s examples of body work such as Alexander Technique, etc., the Gurdjieff Work promotes “improved living” and the “potency” of awareness as a style, in the phenomenological sense of the word, of

“beauty.” In so far as the art of achieving such awareness may be equated with beauty, and beauty with an exceptional quality of life, the aesthetic dimension of the Work is relevant in terms of both the aim of this text and the potential of a given life to be re-conceptualized as a “work-in-progress/process.”

Introducing Mr. G.

The body of literature surrounding Gurdjieff’s system tends to be limited to that of insiders, that is, students of the system whose focus is on explicating certain aspects of its vast array of ideas and practices. Some exceptions appear here, though I will draw mostly upon what are considered to be the primary texts of both Gurdjieff and his early students, P. D. Ouspensky’s *In Search of the Miraculous* and *The Psychology of Man’s Possible Evolution*, as well as Gurdjieff’s own *Views from the Real World*. I will also refer periodically to my own personal experience with students of this Work. For extended biographical studies of Gurdjieff, see Bennett (1974) and Webb.

Philosopher and early student of Gurdjieff, P.D. Ouspensky distinguishes between two systems of psychology: “systems which study man *as they find him* or *such as they suppose or imagine him to be* and systems which study man from the point of view of what he may become; that is, from the point of view of his *possible evolution*” (*Psychology* 6). In the former category could be placed each of the critical theories outlined in this text, with the possible exception of those put forth by Silverman and (certainly) Deleuze and Guattari, whose re-conceptualization of the self/other dichotomy and formulation of “becoming,” respectively, anticipate a subjective “evolution,” abstract though this “program” may be. Ouspensky’s second category is also relatively elusive to

the extent that it posits what cannot be immediately apprehended by conventional theoretical or medical methodologies. Nevertheless, what is “found” in the Gurdjieff system is an embodied subject that resembles more a machine than an advanced organism – the subject whose experience is dictated by habituated, reactionary responses. To initiate an “evolution” of this “machine,” emphasis is placed first on understanding and secondly on re-circuiting the mechanics of the body/self. The focus on a possible evolution thus completes the process of exposing a fraudulent subjectivity and generating a praxis that works to reverse the effects of “misrecognition.”

Gurdjieff advances a taxonomy of consciousness, citing two primary levels, each with its own defining characteristics but implicated in the other. The “sleep” and “waking” states distinguish the subject in his or her general condition within the context of a humanity for which underdevelopment is the rule rather than the exception (Ouspensky, *In Search* 141). The “sleeping” consciousness is just that, the state, according to Webster, of “rest afforded by a suspension of the voluntary exercise of the bodily functions and the natural suspension, complete or partial, of consciousness.” However, Gurdjieff extends this definition to denote not only physical repose but the state generally, though erroneously experienced as wakefulness. The “active” subject (as every[wo]man) is thus given to a somnambulism that holds little resemblance to consciousness. Hence, the metaphor (which is hardly metaphorical) of the extended definition and the intended irony of the second “waking” state. These conditions are followed by two additional states, what Ouspensky identifies as “self-consciousness” and “objective consciousness” (141), that are typically inaccessible to one who has not

undertaken a particular mode of work on oneself. I will address these and their concomitant work in a moment.

Under normal life conditions (life without a “work” practice), the subject oscillates, between the first two states, from complete to partial unconsciousness. At the root of this condition lies a fundamental misrecognition, the individual’s ascription to herself or himself of the ability to *do* and to *be*. For only a conscious self has the capacity to act on its own volition and to exist outside of or, perhaps, alongside subjective states of (un)consciousness. The individual functioning only in states one and two, however, falls prey to an illusion of interrupted consciousness that precludes a sustained vision of his or her actual condition and thus resembles a machine with no central intelligence or, to be more specific, no center. Ouspensky asks:

what does it mean that man is a machine? It means that he has no *independent movements*, inside or outside of himself. He is a machine which is brought into motion by *external influences* and *external impacts*. All his movements, actions, words, ideas, emotions, moods, and thoughts are produced by external influences. By himself, he is just an automaton with a certain store of memories of previous experiences, and a certain amount of reserve energy (*Psychology* 12)

This “store of memories” and “reserve energy,” along with various other factors (education, social standing, name, etc.) combine to form the individual’s personality which, like the rational, Cartesian “I,” assumes the role of a dominant “I” at any moment, thinking and feeling its way through experience according to established patterns of response that contribute to an illusion of constancy.^{lxv} The process by which the subject, as a machine, maintains the illusion of cohesion in its reactions to the external world is referred to, familiarly, as identification – “in the state of identification one does not see and one does not hear. One is wholly in one’s grievance, or in one’s desire, or in one’s

imagination. One cannot separate oneself from things or feelings or memories, and one is shut off from all the world around” (75).

And yet there exists a paradox in our (passive) reception of exteriority. At one level, the subject is removed from the “world around,” whilst on another, he or she is impressed, as in inscribed by – food. We are what we eat. According to Ouspensky, Gurdjieff recognizes three kinds of food, that which we eat, the air we breathe and what he calls “impressions” that mark the subject via the senses (*In Search* 181). We might understand this taxonomy in terms of the degree to which we carry our identifications with us, unconsciously, of course, in the everyday. Written on the body.

Such identification is, given a certain willfulness, a simple process to observe in oneself in so far as that from which we cannot ordinarily separate ourselves – our emotions, associative thoughts, internal dialogues, desires, etc. – is forcefully incessant. And herein, of course, lies the crux of the problem. The Gurdjieffian subject is not one but many, a composite of countless “I’s” as depicted in Sarraute’s *You Don’t Love Yourself*, each determined by the sway of forces acting on and with ego or the personality that “eats.”^{lxvi} In correspondence to the demands of a given situation, the subject manifests, unconsciously, an “I” that is most “appropriate” to that situation. In other words, he or she produces, out of memory, out of prior experience, the condition for receiving the most pleasure and the least amount of pain and identifies that “I,” again, in an unconscious effort, as the sole existent. This process continues throughout life and is strengthened by habit, as is the Lacanian notion of *meconnaissance*, the identification of the infant stage that becomes reinforced through adulthood. One sees a parallel here with Buddhist psychology, in which the desire to achieve pleasure and avoid suffering is

assumed to propel one in a seemingly endless spiral of *samsara*, the ignominious round of rebirth. Desire, in this case, becomes the dynamic source of the subject's fragmentation.^{lxvii}

To illustrate how these "I's" function in routine experience, I return to the example from chapter one of the subject who walks down a street and confronts the varied gazes of passersby. The form of identification that assails this hypothetical but common figure, according to Gurdjieff, is what he calls "internal considering," a mode of thought and behavior in which one

is identified with what others think about him, how they treat him, what attitude they show towards him. He always thinks that people do not value him enough, are not sufficiently polite and courteous. All this torments him, makes him think and suspect and lose an immense amount of energy on guesswork, on suppositions, develops in him a distrustful and hostile attitude towards people. How somebody looked at him, what somebody thought of him, what somebody said of him – all this acquires for him an immense significance (Ouspensky, *In Search* 151).

So one identifies with this particular strain of associative thought and consequently manifests an "I" based on fear, inferiority, competitiveness, etc. Once the student has achieved a certain degree of control over his or her attention, however, he or she may practice "external considering," whereby one "does that which makes life easy for other people and for [oneself]" (153). Ouspensky continues: "... if a man really remembers himself he understands that another man is a machine just as he is himself. And then he will *enter into his position*, he will put himself in his place, and he will be really able to understand and feel what another man thinks and feels" (153). Once again, we are reminded of Silverman's "active gift of love," the difference being that of degree; only in the immediacy of *conscious* experience can one achieve a relation of "external

considering” to the other. I shall refer to the central practice of remembering oneself in a moment.

The fact of the subject’s vulnerability to debilitating, imaginary presumptions regarding his or her relation to the other is not one to celebrate. Nor is it a condition that one is inclined to recognize. To stave off such recognition for the purpose of functioning in a manner that is both familiar and safe, one develops, from an early age (six to eighteen months?), involuntary “buffers,” “artificial appliances” that serve to cushion contradictions that arise from the constant shifting between “I’s” (154). Just as desire preserves a notion of the solidified self against the reality of lack in the Lacanian model, “buffers” safeguard this same sense of self from the reality of mechanicalness and conscienceless behavior. “‘Buffers’ lull a man to sleep, give him the agreeable and peaceful sensation that all will be well, that no contradictions exist *‘Buffers’ are appliances by means of which a man can always be in the right.* ‘Buffers’ help a man not to feel his conscience” (155). Exposing and dismantling, if only temporarily, the mechanism that precludes access to mechanical reaction obviously demands a praxis that is at once concordant with and exterior to theoretical knowledge.

Identification and its resultant splintering of subjectivity is not the only means by which the subject becomes entangled in misrecognition. Gurdjieff maintains that the subject is comprised of five centers – the intellectual, the emotional, the moving, the instinctive and the sex center. Each has its own function and a limited amount of energy with which to fulfill that function. Ideally, the centers remain devoted to their respective tasks, thereby creating a condition that is conducive to proper functioning of the body/self. However, for most, the centers do not perform in accordance with the (extra-

ordinary) standard. Rather, they “steal” one another's energy and overlap in their duties to the extent that the emotional center, for example, does the work of the intellectual center, resulting in a depletion of energy from the organism as a whole, which in turn prevents the possibility of right operation. Gurdjieff asserts that

working on oneself is not so difficult as wishing to work, taking the decision. This is so because our centers have to agree among themselves, having realized that, if they are to do anything together, they have to submit to a common master. But it is difficult for them to agree because once there is a master, it will no longer be possible for any of them to order the others about and to do what they like. There is no master in ordinary man. And if there is no master, there is no soul (*Views* 214).

A soul, according to Gurdjieff, is not a fact but a possibility and is commensurate with being. And without being, there is no subject.

Cathexis as Praxis

Irrespective of his or her ontological status, the individual ceaselessly exerts energy. The sexual masochist exerts a particular kind of energy whilst formulating and enacting a “program,” an exertion that can be more or less productive depending upon the degree of identification with “phantasy.” Even when identification is the primary regulator of experience, when the sexual act is undertaken in “sleep,” one could argue that the masochist is at least opening a liminal space in which to channel and *feel* the condition of sexual embodiment. The sex center and its energy, according to Gurdjieff, is the only one (along with “higher” emanations of the other centers) that is neither positive nor negative. Consequently, it carries the potential to serve individual efforts beyond instinctive, emotional and intellectual capacities. In other words, sexual energy is exceptionally powerful (Ouspensky, *In Search* 55, 255-59).

Freud's notion of libido cathexis, a "charge of energy" (*General* 368), might provide a point of comparison with Gurdjieff's explication of the sex center, particularly in terms of the centrality it maintains in an individual's life. What is perhaps more useful in understanding the Gurdjieffian subject, however, is the psychical orientation of decathexis away from (or a "disinvestment in") objects (Decant, "Automatism" 242). Rather than being invested in "phantasy," libidinal energy comes to serve the death drive, an unsurprising shift given the ego's ultimate basis in lack. As psychoanalyst Patrick Decant puts it, the ego "develops from the interplay of identification and the seizing of an ideal" (249). From a Freudian/Lacanian perspective, there is very little that we might consider productive in this interplay, a scenario that recalls the eventual death of the subject's "essence" in Gurdjieff's system. On the other hand, we might also consider decathexis, and the death drive itself, in relation to the impulse, however contrived by a methodology, to "die" to oneself, to the personality. Without such a death, Gurdjieff warns us, the aforementioned "soul" is a nebulous project indeed.

In drawing a parallel between being and agency (the capacity to *do* or to will), it is clear, then, that the latter, as with the Althusserian subject, has little or no role in subjective experience prior to specific work on oneself. And yet, the value of a system such as the one Gurdjieff put forward is that the subject can be made explicitly aware of his or her condition and proceed accordingly. Hence, my thesis that this system continues where its postmodern complements leave off, by offering a path to integrity, to the development of a single, "masterful" "I." Such Work clearly requires a mode of engagement beyond theorization. Consequently, Ouspensky explains, it is neither the method of the *fakir*, whose focus is on physical asceticism, that of the monk, who relies

on faith and emotional investment, nor that of the yogi, the way of knowledge and the intellect (the Platonic man of hegemonic reason; the contemporary theorist vested in intellectual prowess...). Rather, the Work encompasses each of these ways and is therefore known as the Fourth Way (Ouspensky, *In Search* 44-80). It requires a degree of commitment from the student that is pervasive of the everyday, a commitment that will inevitably create the “friction” of confronting desire that is necessary to “shock” one into awareness and *action*. Indeed, just as the Lacanian subject is fated to collapse into the misrecognition of himself or herself as the *imago*, into the desire of an Ideal-I, so, too, is the Gurdjieffian self subject to an initially fragmented ontology. This orientation towards integrity is thus a methodology of transcending the bondage of an original, primal *meconnaissance* that is perpetuated through continued identification. The subject confronts his or her desire as it is manifested in relation to the act of identifying, thus becoming conscious of the process of identification *at the moment of its inception*.

In addition to the original (and, in most cases, frightfully perpetual) subjective consciousness (or lack thereof), Gurdjieff presents seven levels of self-development relative to lesser or greater degrees of wakefulness. Corresponding to the first three centers, men (generic) numbers one, two and three, instinctive, emotional and intellectual, represent ordinary, subjective man. It is the space between three and four in which the subject, awakening to the schizophrenia of her or his daily existence, is faced with the possibility of transformation, of becoming-consciousness. And like any becoming, the stages are neither linear nor mutually exclusive. They interact, intersect, digress, expand and contract (with “a maximum of calculated sobriety”) according to the manner in which one uses and abuses energy.

This process begins with the practice of self-remembering, the core practice of the Work and the third state of consciousness after the “waking” state. To remember oneself means first to observe oneself, one's thoughts, emotions, behavior, etc. and the energy that is expended in the operation of each function. What this translates into, of course, is the (immediate) observation of centers and energy distribution. An obvious parallel is Buddhist insight meditation, or Vipassana, whereby the practitioner calms the mind to the extent that she or he is able to observe the movement of mental and physical aggregates, the observation becoming sharper and more refined with experience. By contrast, practice in the Work is relatively broad and employs a number of techniques or exercises, as they are called, to treat every aspect of the subject. The student is placed in particular situations (based upon the specific physical, emotional or intellectual area where he or she is weakest, or most identified) to which the student must adapt; through adaptation, he or she comes to understand the workings of the machine within the context of its environment. Self-remembering, however, is vital to such adaptation. Colin Wilson puts it this way: “We identify ourselves with our personalities; our identities are like the pane of a window against which we are pressed so tightly that we cannot feel our separateness from it. Self-remembering is like standing back, so you can see ‘yourself’ (the window pane) *and* the outside world, distinct from ‘you’”(*Outsider* 266). To simplify this, we might say, with Sophia Wellbeloved, that self-remembering is “seeing both the ‘I’ and the ‘here’ of ‘I am here’” (*Gurdjieff* 187).

For Freud, “the unconscious must be assumed to be the general basis of psychical life” (quoted, Decant, “Automatism...” 245). The repletion of its signifiers is deceptive in so far as their “play” in the psychic life of the subject makes of the unconscious a

scene of lack towards which the psyche naturally and consistently regresses. “The aim of self-remembering,” however, “is to relegate nothing to the unconscious” (Decant 250). Through this practice, then, one breaks the chain of identifications and associative thinking that keeps one grounded in an artificial sense of unity; self-remembering forges moments of consciousness, consciousness of lack that in turn generates, or upholds, “I” as distinguished from unconscious displacement activity and inertia.

The most important “procession” to “remember,” I would argue, is that which marches, in alliance but more often than not, out of step with, the emotional center in so far as feeling so immediately generates experience. One may ask, for example, what am I feeling when I feel strongly (in terms of corporeal sensation that may be recognized in the abdomen, the chest or between the legs, for example)? One may feel deep affection for another, animosity, a desire to create, succeed or suffer. To be bound by another’s ropes, invited to another’s table. One contemporary Gurdjieff teacher has claimed that “we always get what we want” (personal letter), an assertion that is not necessarily in contradiction to the Rolling Stones’ similar proclamation that offers the caveat of “need.” Nor does it imply a one-to-one correspondance between wish and fulfillment. Rather, the temperament and quality of a given emotion produces comparable experience. In this sense, desire lies opaquely somewhere between Lacanian lack and Deleuzian productivity. But it must be observed or “remembered” before it can be placed in the service, if need be, of living well. What we “eat” and how we “eat” it matters.

Such practice is the initial step of liberation for the developing subject (man number four) and continues to be the focus of the Work throughout her or his lifetime. However, though the practice must ultimately be undertaken by the student himself or

herself, it must be supplemented by the acquisition of knowledge; neither aspect, practice nor knowledge, is easily accessible without proper guidance. Hence, the role of the teacher. As Fourth Way instructors are not prone to proselytizing, only the dedicated student will locate his or her place in the Work. This is accomplished by what Gurdjieff calls a “magnetic center” that evolves in the subject as a result of arduous searching, directing the student, if circumstances allow, towards those influences necessary for his or her development. We may certainly take the “magnetic center” to be metaphorical rather than biological, though unlike the simple pleasures of poetic license, it necessitates perspicuous payment. Aside from the consideration of a teacher’s services, remuneration for this instruction is great, amounting to no less than the sacrifice of one’s suffering to a higher purpose, the inevitable suffering of interacting with the world as well as that which arises from direct confrontation with the “machine.”^{lxviii} If we are to take the First Noble Truth of Buddhism that all life is suffering as gospel, then we realize, by extension, that the ultimate sacrifice of the Work is that of dying and being reborn to a life of consciousness whereby suffering is made productive rather than egocentric. And it is at this point that we come to the objective subject, men numbers five, six and seven.

Man number four has awakened to the multiplicity of his or her fabricated identity and to the necessity of transformation. The tools of this transformation are supplied to the student in accordance with the demands of his or her needs and the force of the magnetic center in relation to various distractions (habitual, ideological, etc.) external to the Work. What remains is the practice itself. Only after many years of conscientious study and work can the student hope to become master of herself or himself, to achieve a singularity of being, a single “I” that does not react automatically but exerts its own will.

Like the disciple asked to throw down his nets to follow Christ, so too must the student of the Fourth Way be caught “from the sea to [be lifted] out of the service of nature, to [be brought] to the realization of another more conscious world in which [she or he] must learn to breath, by means of another order of Truths” (Nicoll, *New* 82). Men numbers five six and seven represent gradations of such a consciousness, the distinction between which being determined by the development of the sixth and seventh centers, the higher intellectual and emotional centers. Both of these centers are said to be present in the ordinary human being but without functioning to their utmost capacity, as they are inaccessible to mere waking consciousness. Ouspensky ascribes the following characteristics to the advanced levels of self-development:

Man number five is a man who has acquired *unity* and *self-consciousness*. He is different from ordinary man, because in him one of the higher centers already works, and he has many functions and powers that an ordinary man ... does not possess. Man number six is a man who has acquired *subjective consciousness*. Another higher center works in him.... Man number seven is a man who has attained all that a man can attain. He has a *permanent “I”* and *free will*. He can control all the states of consciousness in himself and he already cannot lose anything he has acquired. According to another description, *he is immortal within the limits of the solar system* (*Psychology* 54-5).

Whilst questions of “immortality” and cosmology are clearly beyond the scope of this analysis, the conclusion drawn by Gurdjieff regarding the advanced self is that he or she is one who occupies the fourth state of consciousness, “objective consciousness” (as opposed to a subject susceptible to the vicissitudes of interior and exterior life) in so far as he or she purportedly exists at the highest level of consciousness in a lifetime, based on the material and information at hand; namely, that the subject has gained control over the functions of his or her organism, exists as a uniform consciousness that is capable of *doing* and *being* as such and, consequently, lives his or her life in assent to a framework

of a different order from those that govern ordinary (wo)man. This agentic subject is thus a singular consciousness whose singularity does not preclude a multiplicity of action or sensibility. Indeed, let us now distinguish between the latter and the Cartesian subject who *is* by virtue of mere thought. The Gurdjieffian man number seven *is* in so far as she is an astute *observer* of thought, emotion, sensation, law. Through work on himself, the fragmented Lacanian subject has been given the means by which to surmount the primacy of his or her misrecognition that is, in fact, a product of negligible thought. No longer does the mirror and its generation of *méconnaissance* dictate an ideal that is as formless as it is fraudulent. To bring Deleuze into the framework (as paradoxical as this may be) man number seven may be understood as “singular but not homogenous.” In other words, he or she is still subject to multiplicity in an “actualized world” but remains singular in terms of an enduring critical distance from the shifts of life in that world by virtue of the acquisition of specific, and embodied, knowledge and experience. He or she operates, according to Gurdjieff, in a multiplicitous world from the vantage point of a single “I” rather than a multitude of automatic “I’s.”

Even if cosmology and its attendant “objective consciousness” did fit into the purview of this study as more than a distant, and for some, perhaps, highly problematic ontology, what options would be available for analyzing it? Gurdjieff himself makes every effort, both in his writing and, one learns from biographical material, to retain the esoteric nature of such advancement; not, I suspect, to obscure it from critical reflection, but to insure that its embodied practice is not tainted by excessive and corporeally uninformed thought. Laying no claim to such advancement myself, I will limit my own analysis of “men” numbers five, six and seven to the suggestion that neither denial nor

blind acceptance of these categories is useful. The mere fact alone that a system such as that put forward by Gurdjieff presents a model of development as rigorous and complex as it is critical of conventional notions of agency warrants its inclusion here and in future studies.

Cathexis as Praxis 2

But getting back to a relatively concrete praxis. There is something disconcerting about translating it into discourse, be it the experience of a novel, a film, a performance or a piece of music. What might be called, for lack of a better word, “spiritual” practice is even more difficult to articulate and necessitates, to some degree, its framing within an aesthetic or academic context, as a phenomenon to be analyzed and interpreted.^{lxix} Something is inevitably lost in this process, of course – the “how” as opposed to the “what” of the action. In relation to the former, I can only concede the loss and continue to offer other practices that are less central to the Work but more accessible in terms of what could be referred to as their “readerly” quality. The practice of becoming aware of the body, for example, without reference to specific centers or the immediate environment, is known simply as “sensing,” wherein one directs attention to the limbs and holds it, disallowing other preoccupations to intrude. There is nothing remarkable in this preliminary exercise. Still, it points the practitioner in the direction of self-knowledge (and self-remembering) that is indeed remarkable for its holistic quality, the manner in which it directs mind towards body, the two “poles” being indistinguishable in the act of sensing.

Another, more “writerly” example, from one of Gurdjieff’s own texts, *Life Is Real Only Then, When “I Am,”* suggests an exercise whereby one may learn to demarcate between two modes of mind/body experience:

First, all of one’s attention must be divided approximately into three equal parts; each of these parts must be concentrated on one of the three fingers of the right or left hand, for instance the forefinger, the third and the fourth, constating in one finger – the result proceeding in it of the organic process called “sensing,” in another – the result of the process called “feeling,” and with the third – making any rhythmical movement and at the same time automatically conducting with the flowing of mental association a sequential or varied manner of counting (113).

The discursive elaboration of this practice exemplifies Gurdjieff’s playfulness with language in terms of an excessively verbose style (not unlike that of Lacan’s intentionally obscure texts) and the tremendous divide between discourse and practice. It also provides a taste of what Gurdjieff calls the “movements,” “dance” exercises that involve the body/self in its entirety, however fragmented it may be. As he explains, “In all things, we have the aim to develop something which cannot be developed directly or mechanically – which interprets the whole man: mind, body and feeling” (*Views* 183). The movements typically involve casting and dividing attention to these aspects that arise in the moment of physical action. What should be clear about such body-centered practices, then, even one as straightforward as “sensing,” is that they require a particular knowledge and motivation that must be acquired in concert with physical work.

Gurdjieff’s deliberate entanglement of physical praxis with convoluted, and sometimes quite humorous language, would seem to indicate his awareness of both the limitations and the power of his own discourse. If we are to assume the validity of higher levels of consciousness, the question remains as to the conscious subject’s relation to the general trappings of discourse. Does higher consciousness imply the subject’s

transcendence of itself as constructed by the rhetoric of culture, by speaking, viewing or by reading? In other words, is man number seven impervious to interpellation? Can she experience the “text” without being subsumed by what Derrida might call its omnipresence?

The answer lies, I will argue, in Gurdjieff's distinction between personality and essence. Ouspensky describes personality as that which does not belong to the subject, that which “has come from outside, what he has learned, or reflects, all traces of exterior impressions left in the memory and in the sensations, all words and movements that have been learned, all feelings created by imitation - all ... [that] is ‘not his own.’” Essence, on the other hand, “is the Truth in man” (*In Search* 161-62) and thus relates directly to being. So whilst the personality of man number seven may indeed be intimately linked to and informed by aspects of the external world (the pronoun by which she or he refers to herself or himself; a text mired in ideological signification), that which he or she is in essence remains unfettered by personal or external constraints. The personality is subservient to essence and therefore exerts no control over the subject's conscious life which, according to Gurdjieff, is permanent. In Deleuzian terms, we might think of the move away from personality and towards essence as a very particular BwO, a “pursuit of an ecstatic, a-personal affective intensity” (Bogue, “Violence” 112) that culminates in a permanently advanced essence (for man number seven) over the relatively weak(ened) demands of personality. Moreover, I would suggest that what “becomes-imperceptible” under certain “somaesthetic” conditions is precisely the personality in so far as its force is transmuted and obscured.

As crucial to this Work as ordinary, daily life may be, its practices are ultimately conducted in the silence of one's private experience. What such silence entails is a quieting of the personality to such an extent that it becomes a tool for engaging with the external environment rather than an all-encompassing force, an extension of Freudian drives. We might recall Thoreau's claim that veridical silence leaves "no personality [to] disturb us." The Gurdjieffian erasure of self, of those aspects of the individual that are less "truthful," is a paradoxical becoming, the aim of which "is, in a sense, to lose face, to become imperceptible, in order to counteract the very notion of individual stature" (Pisters, *Matrix* 123). Deleuze and Guattari may have entered the upper echelons of popular thought (I was recently given a D(eleuze) & G(uattari) tee-shirt...), but "losing face" or, to be more specific, personality, obviously requires more than exclaiming that one is a "postmodernist" or a "Gurdjieffian." It demands that one enter the silence of music, of listening, the space between or after notes. Productive self-effacement means working against the grain of an ironic conspiracy between "nature" and acculturation, the instincts towards inertia that are fostered by cultural forces in the everyday.

Becoming-consciousness, then, necessitates not peace or the intoxicating comfort of *jouissance*, but an immediate awareness of what Gurdjieff calls the "terror of the situation" – the realization of one's ongoing "diversion from his true purpose" (Wellbeloved, *Gurdjieff* 203) which is, in the final analysis, to "live well." Confronting this "terror" and thus counteracting the diversionary mode that tends to define both our sleeping and waking states in the context of the Work often takes the form of a "shock," a teacher-administered "moment" of self-remembering on the part of the student that temporarily disables the "buffers" of his or her personality by targeting what is weakest

in that personality. Far from a mere philosophical encounter, the moment of a shock is a genuine moment of self-knowledge that is “dangerous” in the sense that cherished but erroneous notions of identity and the various mechanisms that keep them in place are at stake, the “procession of delegates” thrust into a disturbing flash of clarity. The productive masochist is compelled to witness the rudiments of his threshold for organized pain in a sharp exertion, and reception, of energy. The artist finds her somaesthetic taken, at precisely the right moment, to a new plateau, a new level of bursting intensity via what I have already quoted Deleuze as calling the “harsh exercise in depersonalization.”

The education of a shock crescendos, without volume, at the level of objective consciousness, wherein the student becomes-teacher. It is a cliché, but one that is not uncommon in the upward mobility of academic life. And, ironically, in successfully navigating the torrential waters of graduate degrees, it is perhaps the scholar, the intellectual immersed in words who is most vulnerable to delusion regarding his or her own objective consciousness in so far as one writes (even “post-structurally”), and therefore is. Gurdjieff refers to this misrecognition as “lying.” (Ouspensky, *In Search* 231). One imagines, with Descartes, that moments of heightened reason, or forgetfulness and daydreaming, all too frequent, are the material stasis of life, whilst moments of “terror,” of conscientiousness, compose that minutiae of enigmatic experience that rise and falls as quickly as the breath, experience that more often than not goes uninvestigated. And to a certain extent, he or she is absolutely correct to presume as much. For the individual who has not awakened to the ongoing “procession,” as Gurdjieff might say, such a life *is* reality, his or her existence a vague signifier that is in

the process of being constantly emptied and replenished by the filler of daily preoccupations or the persistent “call” of ideology. Such a life, as Camus’ Mersault suggests, that “Might have happened yesterday” (*Outsider* 1).

Of course, existential meaninglessness provides very little in the way of justice. To return to the questions that open this chapter, where is the justice, one may ask, for the individual in relation to a system whereby “living well” is deemed such an exclusive phenomenon? Why does “Truth,” in this instance, cloak itself in the guise of esotericism, leaving ordinary people to founder in an inefficient subjectivity? The answer, in the words of Ouspensky, is not cryptic – “because they do want not it” (*Psychology* 9). The undeveloped subject does not want what he or she does not know to exist or, more commonly, what she or he believes is already in her or his possession – a productive, immutable self. The subject is content with “lying” and daily preoccupations that affirm the naturalism of identification. As Ouspensky explains, “‘injustice’ is one of the words in which very often [internal] considering hides itself” (*In Search* 151). One may take up causes, and identify with those causes, seeking retribution for what displeases him or her as a means of buffering the lack inherent to mechanical life. The “new man,” on the other hand, emerges only from the *conflict* of realization. “So long as a man is not horrified at himself, he knows nothing about himself” (218). “Somaesthetic” Work that strives to counter this primary misrecognition is, for Gurdjieff, the ultimate “balm,” the door to perception, the only aim worth undertaking.

The Return of the Other

Arguably, the focus of this analysis as a whole rests on what has been variously defined as the other as much as the self. As language, ideology, as ideal *imago* or fictitious personality, as human other whom one loves, repudiates or disavows, all of which are interactively and mutually informative, the other has evolved as a pet of postmodern theory in so far as it is recognized as being commensurate with a process of subjectification. It is, of course, far easier to analyze and compartmentalize what is other (even though the other subsumes the self) than it is to look directly at oneself. Like Sartre's voyeur who stands at the keyhole and, quite unexpectedly, finds himself being seen by another in the act of looking, we do not always like what is revealed about us (Silverman, *Threshold* 164). Hence, the process of desire that spurns what is unpleasurable and grasps for that which is gratifying. There is, after all, a certain pleasure in deconstruction – the satisfaction gained from establishing oneself as a qualified opponent to the games people play.

Even in those disciplines that demand self-analysis and observation for the liberation from ignorance, the other remains a focal point. Those elements of immediate experience that we take for granted, the very thoughts, emotions and sensations that provide us with identity, are themselves “other.” However, what distinguishes a “somaesthetics” from other theories, I hope to have demonstrated, is the intention and, indeed, the practice of segregating this other from the self as a point of observation whilst, at the same time, honoring the other for its inevitable role in the experience of self-development, particularly when this other takes the form of a marginalized “someone,” as in Silverman’s example. In other words, the “active gift of love” is

bestowed “at-a-distance” upon those aspects of experience that otherwise assume immutable status in the psychic terrain of the self; it recognizes difference and multiplicity without the need to subsume what can appear threatening by virtue of its “static” nature. Identification is given its due regard, so to speak, and superseded by the extra-ordinary imperative to transcend one’s mechanistic inclinations for the sake of what I have broadly called integrity.

In the trajectory from the exterior to the interior other, we find in the Work that the self and the all-encompassing other are intimately bound, intertwined, and, ultimately, distinguished only by precise observation and a complete re-structuring of consciousness. In cultivating an immediate awareness of identification, this relationship, in its plethora of manifestations, becomes the material with which to (re)construct a life worth living, to slow down the “procession” and settle into the “the one seat,” as the Buddhist says, to become master of oneself. For from this vantage point one may witness “all kinds of scenes and actors, all kinds of temptations and stories, everything imaginable.... [One sees] it all arise and pass, and out of this, wisdom and understanding will come” (Kornfield, *Path* 31). Wisdom, understanding and, perhaps, a better life.

Conclusion | On Virtue and Beginnings

Before the cries and whispers of dissent become too noisy, I should qualify the use of certain words in the previous chapter. The language of Gurdjieff, ensconced as some of it is in modernist discourse, does not, in every instance, make the transition into postmodernity with the rigor and assurance of its practices; this, despite the fact that some of its terms remain embedded in much of what passes for contemporary “spiritual” discourse. “Truth” continues to beguile those for whom continental philosophy is a distant relative (the European one) of conventional, everyday concerns, or a paltry reference on television, the Internet, the radio, a sound-bite excoriating or boosting itself on high culture, or an empty signifier of nothing at all. But in the context of a theoretical analysis, such a word must, of course, be used with great caution. And yet my inclusion of those passages that speak to a dead or, perhaps, an overextended concept is necessary to the extent that ideals that occupy a virtual space outside our ordinary capacity of perception (what Gurdjieff calls the sleeping/waking states) must be allowed to surface,

from above or below, if we are to undertake our own trajectories towards the space of liminal experience in the everyday. It is a process of acquiescence that should not be unfamiliar to anyone who has endured the rite of passage known as the sophomore year at university. In other words, if one is to advance beyond mere intellectualism, experience, in and of the body, must at least be on par with semantic concerns. Hence an ethics of selfhood that calls as much for an unlocking of the vice grip on discursive imperatives as for an initial, “textual” (and empirical) leap into possibilities of agency.

Let us take another troublesome word from the Gurdjieffian vocabulary – “master.” To become master of oneself. To master the myriad “I’s” that vie for dominance within the mind/body of a tenuous subject. The Platonic project revisited. This, for Gurdjieff, is a primary aim for the one seeking agency in his or her life. But immediately a flag goes up. We are reminded, with Silverman, of the loaded Gaze, or with Foucault, of the “docile body,” our own body that is vulnerable to certain “mechanics of power,” that is docile to the degree to which it “may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved” (“Docile”, *Foucault* 180). And how common such docility is and has long been, enough to warrant, it would seem, the work of many scholars who have followed in Foucault’s footsteps (quite obediently, I might add) in the hope of eradicating what is understandably recognized as injustice.

Where, then, are we to place discipline in the spectrum of activities that provides the context for daily life? Of course, Foucault knew about discipline. S&M requires discipline, it requires a particular mastery over oneself that exceeds the discipline that is generally necessitated by daily life. In the practice of S&M, if one is not “subjected, used, transformed, and improved,” something is awry. The same may be said of any

“somaesthetic” practice whose ambition is to make of experience something other than it has previously been, “improvement” being the obvious, and practical, goal. Peering into the intricate conditions of oneself, however evocative of a nefarious surveillance it may be, is a compulsory step in the direction towards the productive coalescence of one’s “delegates.” One remembers oneself and thus becomes-oneseff over and against negative forces that would, and do, usurp the moment.

“The Problem of Agency”

As I have argued throughout this analysis, much of what constitutes postmodern theory stops short of suggesting embodied practices for the development of agency as a consequence of conceptualizing the latter within limited frameworks, be they political or psychoanalytic. This oversight becomes even more pronounced in what might be called the new Humanism, exemplified by Archer’s book, *Being Human: The Problem of Agency*, that I employ as a foundational text at the start of my own. Here the only discipline necessary to the agentic life is that of a natural evolution towards identity, in the quotidian of everyday “practice.” Nonetheless, where I join Archer is in the desire to move beyond, or perhaps between, the two poles of “Modernity’s Man” and “Society’s Gift” and in her corresponding divergence from the totalitarianism of language in subjectivity. Her central claim in response to postmodernism provides at once this point of convergence between our projects and a striking difference: “our continuous sense of self, or self-consciousness, emerges from our practical activity in the world. It therefore cannot be demolished by any linguistic theory, for the simple reason that our sense of selfhood is independent of language” (3). I would amend this argument by suggesting

that both a “continuous sense of self, or self-consciousness” and independence from language are possible only through very particular and very challenging, embodied disciplines such as those outlined in previous chapters. Otherwise, we merely speak of the body and enslave its experience, including that which Archer deems phenomenological, to semantics.

I must take issue with her on two further, related points. For Archer, the height of agency lies in “personal identity” (261) that is itself the product of the interior commentary that runs through the average psyche with incredible speed and range, “commenting” upon one’s emotional and phenomenological field. It is such commentary that, even when stopped, in her estimation, “only becomes discontinuous but does not disappear” and is ultimately “constitutive of our concrete singularity” (193, 318). To begin, the contradiction between this argument and that which seeks to distance the self from language is obvious, a crippling oversight. But I would also submit that the aesthetic style of *Being Human*, a sociological study confined to conventional, academic discourse and structure, is in fact indicative of the “inner conversation” that most of us encounter on a daily basis, and that, moreover, this “use” of “language” in the interiority of one’s everyday self is more detrimental than it is beneficial, constructive as it is of subjectivity in so far as it is automatic, repetitive and “only becomes discontinuous but does not disappear.” Interestingly, when Archer provides examples of the conversation’s discontinuity (mountaineering, making love, etc., experiences that require intense concentration), she fails to discuss the Buddhist meditative practice that appears elsewhere, though fleetingly, in her text. Perhaps such practice would impinge upon her

argument to the extent that it fosters a “continuity of consciousness” beyond the threshold of mere concentration and inner dialogue.

The Virtue of Postmodernism

And yet, credit must go to the theorist “in the pursuit of the morally good life, not in terms of emotivism but by way of vision and commitment” (Archer 55). H. L. Hix, in his far more stylistically postmodern *Spirits Hovering Over the Ashes: Legacies of Postmodern Theory*, proposes an ethics complementary to my own based on the need to honor diversity, as it were, in an age when homogeneity is increasingly characteristic of the socio-political field. He states that “postmodern culture demands of us, and postmodern theory advises us, to abandon the search for a single transcendental canon [of system, belief, discourse, etc.], and become ethical creators” (136). We become creators, in this view, by opening ourselves to and forging links between the many possibilities of thought and action at our disposal rather than simply accepting a dominant “canon” or fiction as “Truth.” “The ethical agent,” he explains in reference to Deleuze and Guattari, “like the musician, creates and liberates, which one can never do by adherence to a canon or confinement within a punctual system” (158). So his is an ethics that calls for a praxis, an aesthetic of postmodern multiplicity as opposed to a singular and tired frolic with “marginal” discourse (an ethics exemplified by Aristotle’s call for “active virtue, as distinguished from the passive acceptance of a code...” [139]). It is an ethics that parallels my own interest in redeeming the experiential in so far as privileging semantics (as one level of engagement with experience amongst others) over the impulse towards embodied self-transformation is, as I have insinuated above, unethical. Moreover, it is

lamentably modernist. However, the irony of postmodern multiplicity relative to such diversity of experience is often lost on scholars who prefer the safety of haggling over, with and in words.

I shall conclude with an examination of Hix's book as the basis for a few concluding remarks about my own ethics. Granted, his penultimate thesis, to which I will attend in a moment, exhibits its own lethargy in so far as it fails to move beyond the (at this stage, somewhat less) transgressive plurality of words and signification. On the other hand, the linkage he provides between a proposed "ethical agent" and notions of "creation" and "liberation" is worthy of attention and, like the work of Silverman, invites consideration of corporeal action. It also invites, of course, the question of what, exactly, the ethical agent is creating and liberating in his or her observance of the postmodern admonishment to "diversify." Put simply, one creates opportunities of knowing and, by extension, liberates ideas, "actions" that are doubtless instrumental to a process of self-development. Hix carries out his ethical project by explicating a number of such ideas within the context of postmodernity and its deluge of theoretical exploration.

He begins, after a clever analysis of "the preface" in light of dubious, authorial intentionality, with "postmodern grief." The intention here is to illuminate the extent to which postmodern theorists are as susceptible to idealizing a past (and thus decrying a present) as are those who came before. Baudrillard has his Byzantium in the form of desire and its usurpation by the screen; Derrida, his "writing," whose battle against the computer "bit" seems, in moments of particular intellectual vapidness, a lost cause (114, 120). What becomes evident, however, is Hix's own grief over fading morals in a civilization in which postmodern relativity has been filtered to a watered-down, techno-

centric “essence” for mass consumption. The chapter concludes with an exaltation of Socrates, whose lived philosophy culminated with the action of a conscientious death, and a challenge to postmodernists to bring such virtue to their own lives and theorization. It is only a mere step in linear time, then, to the figure of the Christ and his own death-action, the example of whom finds its way into Hix’s text in periodic, subtle maneuverings. Only through comparable actions, their courage, intelligence and selflessness, rather than their literal re-enactment, may contemporary individuals, as he says, “forge such a powerful ideal for our new situation and our new selves” (25). And indeed, though he explores other postmodern conditions (aporesis, freedom, beauty, obscenity, censorship, color, love, sex and virtue), it is the last of these that receives the most attention: postmodern virtue as a progenitor of new morals for new selves.^{lxx}

No one can question the need for virtue in a civilization that invites terrorism, creates pop stars out of bubble gum and reproduces these abortions of conscience as reality television (with the possible exception of Michel Houlbeque, who would likely be content with a Huxleyesque extinction...). On the other hand, the postmodern ethics that Hix puts forth, I would argue, does not actually contribute to society by contributing to the embodied transformation of individuals. It is, rather, a celebration of social and political multiplicity that longs to revive (a revival in every sense of the word) a moral potentiality that lies dormant within the collective social body as opposed to the single person. Hence the objective informing his thesis: “... by drawing on the vocabulary of postmodernism, to work toward the creation of a moral language capable of describing and confronting the contemporary emotional and intellectual situations of humans” (110). Without significant reference to Mikhail Bakhtin or Jürgen Habermas, Hix is clearly

interested in a new dialogism whereby communities can function in relative peace, distanced from the noise of thoughtless consumerism and damaging ideologies. Employing this “moral language,” “new selves” will speak without repudiating or subsuming. They will, one imagines, give voice to their “situations” in a manner that takes into account other voices and other situations according to certain moral and ethical criteria provided by the shared language. A noble aspiration.

Nevertheless, Hix’s project of proliferating moral and virtuous activity via “moral language” or responsible communication remains a limited prospect in so far as it privileges discourse over corporeal action. In other words, the emphasis placed on conscientious, dialogical exchange between self and other, be it in the form of conventional language or a discourse of the “look,” necessarily provokes the very codification against which a “postmodern” ethic should work. It does so, predictably and desperately, by promoting the use of “voice” rather than silence, the inevitable (though obviously organic) quagmire of “words, words, words!” rather than the deliberate submission of personality, with all of its prescribed likes and dislikes, to willful introspection. For Hix, along with other theorists, silence is deadly. “Like Job,” he suggests, “our response [to the increasing immorality of language and the culture that produces it] has been to strive toward silence,” a “black” silence that signifies, as only repression can, a defilement of virtue (107). The postmodern theorist, then, armed with a “new” vocabulary and a cognizance of nomadic potentialities, employs discursive interventions into morally obsolete terrains and speaks an esoteric, and ironic, “Truth:” “The writer’s aim is to become an oracle: to achieve a voice so profound that its words

can never be fully fathomed, so forceful that the world conforms to its will. Every sentence a riddle, *every word a fate*" (my italics, 172).

The echo of Genesis here, along with the correlation of "unfathomable" language to biblical parable, is at once bizarre and refreshing in the context of a "postmodern" analysis: bizarre, in that it allows for a kind of mysticism to enter the lecture hall, from which the ineffable has been mostly banished until recent years.^{lxxi} My own sense of refreshment comes out of this very evolution from theory to interior development, a trajectory that does indeed constitute an evolution in so far as the mind and its capacity for reason is a subsidiary organ, second to the impulse towards integral growth that motivates the embodied person. A question arises, of course, as to how one might produce such growth, a "new self," and one answer, as I have pointed out, is to begin by silencing the voice, the personality, not into a "black," fascistic submission but as a means of liberation from the vicissitudes of language, however indispensable it may be. The implication here is not that meditation or esoteric exercises should be instituted in the classroom; what I am suggesting is that consideration be given to an ethics that disables the boundaries between scholarship and the "everyday" by transposing aestheticism onto daily life (and further, academic life), thus affording the "ineffable" a means of becoming-substantial – in individual lives, bodies and, perhaps, communities.

Though he eventually diverged somewhat from the primacy of the political, Sartre conceived the notion of *littérature engagée* which maintains the social and political imperative(s) of literature that must precede aesthetic concerns (*French Novel...*). Clearly such an attitude towards aesthetic practice is rooted in an ethics that is itself the product of profound concern for communal well-being. It is a concern that cannot be

denied. And yet, when traced to something approximating a “core,” the problems of humanity are ultimately found to stem from certain conditions of being a self, irrespective of subject-position – identification, attachment, ignorance, to name a few. My own analysis, then, enlists the aid of “somaesthetic” practice to advance individual development, the microcosmic spaces where *difference that endures* can be activated. Moreover, it does so without subjugating art; on the contrary, the “program” that I examine expands the borders of art beyond localized, political desire, beyond the walls of a theatre, a gallery or the pages of a document, and certainly beyond art for art’s sake. This ethics of selfhood blurs the line between object or happening and practitioner to such an extent that any distinction is made redundant, as it were. Its “agents” may “create,” to return to Hix’s terminology, productive silence and consequently “liberate” the self in “lines of flight” from inertia and useless suffering, from conventions of a toxic logocentrism.

For Gurdjieff, art takes two primary forms – subjective and objective.^{lxxii} The former is produced by personality and is therefore of limited value, whilst the latter is closer to essence in its conception and formulation. The form of objective art will inevitably reflect not necessarily traditional symmetry but cohesion relative to refined levels of attention and knowledge. I would not take such an absolute stand as this. Such a view assumes an objectification of art that precludes aesthetic praxis (the artist-in-process, we might say), in any form and at any level, as being elemental to self-development. In other words, the Gurdjieffian prerogative (at least as it originated) does not allow for the validity of the aestheticization of life outside the parameters of its system. When this allowance is made, however, people change, alter. The particular

styles of aesthetic practice that are most conducive to such change, I have argued, inspire what Peter de Bolla calls “mutism,” the act of “being struck dumb” before art (*Art 3*). Obviously this does not mean that one devolves into an imbecile. Rather, one stops talking, the pace of thought slows, and out of that process immediate experience becomes centered, misted rather than over-saturated by a text, and thus receptive to what the moment beyond words has to offer. Joseph Brodsky claims that “if art teaches men anything, it is to become like art: not like other men” (quoted Hix, *Spirits* 136). I would qualify this by saying that we have the potential to *become-art*, in the everyday, over and over again, a task that certain men and women have undertaken and succeeded in.

Lines of Flight

At the axis of the “new” art, morality, language, situation and self, is consciousness, in all of its degrees, from that of the Neanderthal, at once obsolete and effortlessly current as depicted in the nightly news of contemporary barbarism, to its exercise in the cultivation of attention, focus, aim. The advancement of consciousness is not a matter of succumbing to the illusions of a monolithic and transcendental signified. In so far as it has the capacity to be nomadic, moving “numerically” from one level to another given the right practice, consciousness remains multiplicitous, to the degree that it shifts both forwards and backwards (Gurdjieff’s man number seven aside), the only mark of consistency in the action of consciousness being its facility for self-observation and even this must on occasion give to the pressure of mechanical forces. A regularity of such awareness, however, minimizes the negative impact of those moments in which the “new” is inaccessible.

The unitary, single “I” that is foregrounded in this analysis is always moving. It moves, and specifically, it *does*, by virtue of the development and inevitable forgetfulness of self-knowledge born of a silent poiesis, a poiesis that begins and ends with the body, only to pursue another line of flight, another embodiment, in the subversion of misrecognized beginnings and endings. Such knowledge is, finally, what we seek in the space between our philosophies and our quotidian in so far as it births the “virtue” that is most often sought, with little lasting success, in words. Postmodern virtue, or any kind of virtue for that matter that is worthy of conscious selfhood, hinges upon the quiet mind.

Post Script | On Being Able

Great works intensify life, and life is intensified in us when we encounter them. No matter what your specific aims and purposes, an intensification of *power* and of a feeling for life will better equip you to accomplish them, for power is a matter of ‘being able,’ a capacity for doing things (Baugh, “How...” 52).

The text, like a self, concludes and begins again, always already in circulation, open to new linkages and entryways. Though it is not my intention to ascribe greatness to my own work, I offer a “post-script” in the hopes of exemplifying, in the “moment” of the reader’s becoming-text, the degree to which the present study is determined to substitute a collection of “aberrant [but mutually forthcoming and conditionally cognate] lines” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 312) for a hierarchical or arborescent framework of theoretical and practical self-inquiry. The trajectory away from language and towards a productive, physical silence is crucial, I have argued, though as the divide between “great works” and selves reading, viewing, listening and “remembering” evaporates in a process of mutual becoming, the “feeling for life,” as Deleuze scholar Bruce Baugh puts it, achieves greater levels of intensification. One has the capacity, he explains, to

cultivate modes of experience that most of us take for granted – “being able” and “doing” – precisely the abilities that Gurdjieff warns us are well beyond the human condition in ordinary life, life without proper self-knowledge, action and conscientious suffering. The “great work” is one that provides an invitation to experience on the margins of the text’s supposed borders, where our nascent abilities may be tried and tested. “It is a question,” Baugh asserts, “of seeing what use a text is in the extra-textual practice that prolongs the text” (qtd, 36). Each of the texts covered in this study serves as a link to such “use” by providing entry points, nodes in a rhizomatic web that is itself in a process of constant becoming; becoming-silence being, in this writer’s own trajectory, the preferred and most engaging form of “intensification.”

“Prolonging” the text so that it becomes something else, something new, achieving a new function. There are at least three modes of time being suggested in Baugh’s assertion: the time of a text’s narrative, the time of reading, viewing or listening and that which follows on the periphery of the text, leaving traces of written, auditory or visual discourse and thus confounding any notion of textual closure. Such is the dynamic time inspired by the “great” works under consideration here, prompting an interrogation, a “de-chronologicalization” (51-52) that, in keeping with a productive becoming, may lead to a critical, engaged relation to “now,” which in turn actuates an ongoing series of “nows” not unlike what one finds in *The Bathroom*; albeit, ideally, with less awkwardness.

In a moment of “closure,” of practice after my own writing, my primary concern is the time of this textual and “extra-textual” functionality, be it with regard to my text or another’s. To whom does the “now” of a text finally belong in its multifarious utility?

To whom does the James Baldwin short story, “Sonny’s Blues,” for example, belong? A story of two brothers – one straight-laced, the other, Sonny, a troubled musician – that ultimately echoes the controlled chaos, the “deep water” of jazz as one learns to “listen” to the music of the other. As the more conservative brother explains:

All I know about music is that not many people ever really hear it. And even then, on the rare occasions when something opens within, and the music enters, what we mainly hear, or hear corroborated, are personal, private, vanishing evocations. But the man who creates the music is hearing something else, is dealing with the roar rising from the void and imposing order on it as it hits the air. What is evoked in him, then, is of another order, more terrible because it has no words, and triumphant, too, for that same reason. And his triumph, when he triumphs, is ours (2097).

Reading the approximation of jazz in Baldwin’s prose, “listening” to its musicality that operates both within and outside the “personal” and the “private,” one is offered participation in a triumph that “trembles” like the cup on Sonny’s piano as the band strikes into another piece in the story’s own closure. What is prolonged is the resonance of media assembled in a text, and further, an embodied act of reading, in time, that is as terrible as it is sublime. Invited to join the musician onstage, one is given the opportunity to stake ownership in his or her own depths, however dangerous, “dumb” or automatic they may be.

The reader, the cinemaphile, the music lover and the spiritual practitioner cross their own liminal thresholds, generate their own lines of resistance with the “great work” as one point among many that challenge us to accept a new configuration of selfhood. We enter the stream of practices and the ideas that aid in communicating them where we are comfortable, according to, one senses with optimism, a particular symmetry. Of course, one may find that these practices differ only in methodology; that “function” in the service of what John Cage calls “self-alteration” comes to be the primary impetus

propelling excursions across borders in a variety of media. We might consider the theatre work of Jerzy Grotowski as exemplary here, his eventual move away from performance for the sake of performance and towards acting practice as self-development alone. What happens to the text in this case, the words and bodies that entertain? It not only belongs to the practitioner, it *is* him or her. Fortunately, the Lauren Hartke's of the world continue to share their practice and wise suffering.

To Begin Again

If we are to accept Felix Guattari's statement that "all great results produced by human endeavours depend upon taking advantage of singular points where they occur" (qtd, Houle, "Micropolitics" 94), we may assume that there is something serendipitous about each such point regardless of its medium or flavor, a potential "greatness." Here we encounter this word once again in the "post-script," as adjective, and in my own usage, as noun, an ineffable though somehow seductive condition towards which we are compelled to direct our attention. In the final, if enduring, analysis of the present text, it is such a direction that seems worthy of a scholar's endorsement. For what is "greatness" after all, after writing? I would suggest that it is the ability to be fully present in a now, and the ongoing series of nows that constitutes a life, regardless of what a given moment has to offer. Certain texts, as I have pointed out, coax attention, to the immediate but austere experience of their words, images, sounds, offering "greatness" as a multiplicitous network, a proliferation of moments that extend throughout the life of an embodied self. To renew, in a relatively young century, Cage's own optimism, the

present moment is great in and of itself, the text, a useful footnote that serves to herald, and nurture, that greatness.

Endnotes

ⁱ Henceforth I shall use the term subject to indicate the “self” in the theoretical context under investigation given the problematic nature of agency within this context.

ⁱⁱ See Cavarero's *In Spite of Plato*. New York: Routledge, 1995. Though I will go into greater detail in chapter two, it seems necessary here to identify the psychoanalytic category of the symbolic order to which Cavarero alludes as inextricably bound to language. As shall become clear in relation to postmodernism, language is the definitive medium of subject production, including but not limited to the construction of gender.

ⁱⁱⁱ “I can’t refute you, Socrates,” Agathon said, ‘ so I dare say you’re right.’

‘No,’ said Socrates, ‘it’s the truth you can’t refute, my dear Agathon. Socrates is a pushover’” (Plato, *Symposium* 41).

^{iv} Silverman is using the term discourse here to designate a discursive territory that far exceeds (though includes) the spoken or written declamation of Descartes' philosophical narrative, for example. Rather, she is employing the notion of discourse as an ideologically-based phenomenon which, in postmodern thought, tends to inform and thus constitute the subject as an agent of ideology.

^v It will become clear that the notion of “man constituting himself” through language is not as agentic a prospect as it might seem as one meanders further in the direction of postmodern conceptions of subjectivity.

^{vi} See Jean Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*: “ ... to perceive is to *look at*, and to apprehend a look is not to apprehend a look-as-object in the world (unless the look is not directed upon us); it is to be conscious of *being looked at*” (quoted, Jay, *Downcast* 288). It is important to note here a distinction between the terms “look” and “gaze.” The former may be understood as “activity implied by the human eye [ie. perception]” (Silverman, *Threshold* 167), whereas the latter carries implications of a more extensive “activity” that involves ideological maneuvering which may ultimately be attributed to both participants in the exchange. I use the term gaze here because my final aim is to explore subjectivity as well as its origin(s). However, in so far as the look relegates attention to the recipient of the gaze and the internal processes that work to (re)embody that gaze, it cannot be neglected in the anecdote at hand.

^{vii} I will elaborate on these forms in the following chapters when I discuss popular mediums of art such as film and photography.

^{viii} The word permeate is used quite intentionally here to indicate the “porous” nature of the Foucauldian subject, a characterization that is typical of the postmodern subject in general. Indeed, its vulnerability to the sway of ideological forces is manifested not only in the conferral of identity but in the subjective body itself, imbricated with “holes” through which may pass (and anchor) prescriptions of bodily form and consciousness. See Michel Foucault. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*. Ed. Colin Gordon. Trans. by Colin Gordon et al. New York: Pantheon, 1980. Pgs. 55-63. See also Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

^{ix} Such an extension is, of course, the *raison d'etre* of this analysis. All too often, however, what is produced by a given theoretical exercise (as has been argued,

legitimately or not, against continental feminist theory) is just that - an exercise in intellectual achievement that provides no basis for social praxis. It is widely known that Foucault, on the other hand, was occupied throughout his life with both political and personal transgression. See Miller: *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, pgs. 87-88.

^x Of course, most of us will never experience life under the conditions of literal panopticism. A more common correlate might be found in a television program such as CSI (Crime Scene Investigation), in which, for better or for worse, the subject is graphically subjected to an authoritarian gaze down to his or her DNA. We can occupy no space, we are told, without leaving a trace of ourselves for identification and subjectification.

^{xi} The increase in the rate of information dispersion alone cannot be underestimated for interpellative quality. Television, radio and the proliferation of the printed word are obvious examples of media that work to produce the ideal viewer, listener or reader.

^{xii} I am, of course, referring to a distinction between liberal and conservative ideologies. However, the line between is easily blurred when, for example, a model of subjectivity such as presented in Freudian psychoanalysis that aims to deconstruct the unified subject categorizes, either through neglect of feminine experience or overt declaration, woman as fundamentally inferior to man.

^{xiii} Though the work of Lacan shall constitute the psychoanalytic thrust of my study, it is clear that this line hardly exhausts psychoanalysis and its myriad schools and theories. Kleinian, object-relations and Winnicottian modes of analysis, to name a few, each advance theories of subjectivity that open the territory of psychoanalysis as theory and practice.

^{xiv} I shall use a capital "O" only in reference to the category of the Other as put forward by Lacan, as opposed to a more general application of otherness that I deploy for the purpose of identifying both exterior and interior forces that inform the subject. Where it is necessary to engage with the other as human being and subject-position (as opposed to thought, emotion or corporeal sensation), I will indicate the other as such.

^{xv} I will return to the contrast between the subject of desire and the subject of repulsion in the following chapter on the work of Kaja Silverman.

^{xvi} Thus, a parallel may be drawn between the "splits" encountered between the Imago in the mirror and that of the speaking and the spoken subjects. Hence, the co-operation of the mirror stage and the symbolic.

^{xvii} Though this over-simplification is curiously and compellingly corroborated by Roland Barthes, as I will demonstrate below.

^{xviii} This is not to posit an inherent meaning or even intention of the photographer that the viewer merely extracts and embodies. Rather, in keeping with the Foucauldian paradigm, the process of interpellation is given parameters that extend beyond its immediate participants (ie. the viewer and the photographer - regardless of their distance, temporal and otherwise).

^{xix} Castration theory maintains that the male, in this case, the viewer, objectifies the female in order to gain control over her and thus, his innate fear of castration "exemplified" by a "lack" in the female anatomy.

^{xx} The resultant fear of castration anxiety is, for Freud, attributable to both males and females. The male child, recognizing the difference between his own genitals and those of a female, "is horrified at the possibilities it reveals to him" (*A General* 326), namely,

the potential loss of his penis. As for the female, Freud continues, “we know that they feel themselves handicapped by the absence of a large visible penis and envy the boy's possession of it” (ibid., 327).

^{xxi} This “embodiment” can perhaps be better understood when considered within the context of the Foucauldian body that is constituted by power networks and processes, as opposed to the “natural” body of classical thought that exists “outside” culture and cultural signification.

^{xxii} By experience, I do not wish to imply a mode of existence in and of itself, as distinct from a cultural context. However, a living self must interact with the gaze to constitute the interpellative process and it is this self who suffers the tyranny of a false sense of identity in the act of identification.

^{xxiii} “... he deciphers the myth, he understands the distortion” (*Mythologies* 128).

^{xxiv} Freud differentiates between sublimation and idealization, while Lacan sees the latter as a kind of manifestation of the former.

^{xxv} The latter of these will figure prominently in my own analysis, along with others, though, as I will demonstrate, the centrality of language will become increasingly, and strategically, problematized.

^{xxvi} While the assignation of self or other to the subject is theoretically interchangeable, it is not necessarily inadvertent when ascribed to “someone.” Indeed, the designation of “someone” (of a lower class, for example) as other and that “someone’s” “willful” embodiment of the marginalized position illustrates the problematic nature of identification.

^{xxvii} This is not to imply that other novels, films, etc. under consideration here have no target audience. However, I would suggest that they “speak” to a relatively broad conditionality as opposed to one limited to marginalized categories.

22 While it is not my intention to overlook such examples as Foucault's political actions or the psychoanalytic objective of mental health, the theoretical conclusions of both Foucault and Lacan regarding the subject leave little or no evidence of agential potential, barring, of course, the semi-consciousness of one's subjective fabrication.

^{xxix} As I have already suggested, Barthes' *Camera Lucida* is clearly at odds with this general oversight in its efforts to allow for the “presence” of a referent.

^{xxx} Strides have been made to include the body in theoretical work, particularly in feminist theory such as that of Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Judith Butler, to name just a few. However, as is indicative of postmodernism, too often the physical body (along with lived emotions and psychic life) becomes lost in the issue at hand, becomes subordinated to the theorized body without historical significance. This subordination tends, in my view, to take the form of generalizations regarding the function of the body, ie., its subsumption under a given, all-inclusive category of identity. This is not to contest the general applicability or validity of theory that accomplishes the crucial task of demythologizing what has become naturalized. On the contrary, my aim is simply to draw attention to the implications of neglecting the “someone” who is theoretically dismembered and re-articulated as a source of “enjoyment.”

^{xxxi} Any theorist, of course, must inevitably betray her or his own allegiances. My own tendency is to privilege those aspects of the psychoanalytic canon that treat the looking and the looked-at subject. Whether or not this subject develops from a primary *meconnaissance* (ie., the mirror stage) is, to some extent, irrelevant, in so far as the

phenomenon of identification in developing years is quite observable. One need only witness the conformity of the teen “market” to the regulations of to-be-looked-at-ness as a simple example of the profundity of vision and visibility. This is not to say that those aspects of psychoanalytic theory (or any theory for that matter) that are not so readily apparent should be dismissed. On the contrary, what I hope to have demonstrated, in the provision of a basis for Silverman's text, is the vast scope of theory that concerns itself, in varying degrees of insight, with the inter-relation between subject and object. And as in a religious practice, one must pick and choose those tenets that are most conducive to personal need and cultural milieu.

^{xxxii} Silverman's reading of Ulrike Ottinger's film *Bildnis einer Trinkerin (Ticket of No Return)*, for example, maintains that the “protagonist stands at an incredible distance from the mirror, and that her pathological relation to her own reflection is the logical extension ... of her inability to accept her exteriority to the idealizing image” (*Threshold* 46). This is the language of Lacanian theory and whether or not Silverman's reading is accurate makes little difference when the viewer who is *not* familiar with the Lacanian register may very well fail to draw the same conclusions. The same may be said of Marcel Duchamp's *Etant donnees* from which Silverman draws an example of an image that works to “re-negotiate the relation between [the] ego and the object” (Ibid. 173). The “ego,” I would argue, is not necessarily predisposed to such a shift in its “relations.”

^{xxxiii} Even Barthes, whose search for a photographic, familial and ultimately, self-validating “essence” in *Camera Lucida* suggests a new humanism, claims that “...what I shall say about each image will never be anything but ... imaginary” (*Roland Barthes* 3). Here, the “infirmity” assumes less a connotation of sickness and more a sense of lack, of image and of subject in so far as the latter is comprised of an “image-repertoire.”

^{xxxiv} Though I would argue that most examples of the “new” art that I present in the following chapters resist co-optation or what Deleuze and Guattari call territorialization by virtue of their extremity or obscurity (their silence, their pace or duration). As portals to the sublime, they may even be said to remain transgressive in spite of the vicissitudes of culture and ideology.

^{xxxv} Here we may understand otherness in its broadest sense, as material object (including human or animal) and as idea or action.

^{xxxvi} See *A Thousand Plateaus*, pgs. 282-86.

^{xxxvii} See the “War-Machine” chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus*, with Felix Guattari. Trns. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

^{xxxviii} Examples may include such composers, however recalcitrant, as Steve Reich, Terry Reilly and Phillip Glass, amongst others. I will address minimalist music in chapter six.

^{xxxix} See Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

^{xl} Parallels may be found in Melville's *Bartleby* or Hal Ashby's filmic *Chance/Chauncey Gardiner (Being There, 1979)*, for example, as opposed to Beckett's overt misanthrope. Toussaint's protagonist, however, is not entirely without aggression, as will soon be evident.

^{xli} One could argue further that this is especially the case with theatre in so far as it is driven by often emotive, spoken discourse.

^{xlii} On a very basic level, we might consider the difference between occupying a solitary space with books, or a film even, and occupying that same space with another person.

Though every such experience unfolds with its own nuances, the difference between solitude and being in the presence of another can be (and I would argue, typically is) markedly different in so far as one is aware of the action of a gaze (one's own and the other's) and all that it beholds – flesh, emotional and intellectual capacity, mortality – and identifies as self.

^{xliii} Some readers may disagree, a position for which I have nothing but sympathy, though the inanimate nature of a book remains, along with the reader's right to pitch it out a window when it speaks too brazenly.

^{xliiv} As opposed to the self-consciousness that erupts the moment a “representative” body appears “onstage.”

^{xliv} See *A Thousand Plateaus*, pg 248.

^{xlvi} Here I am obviously allowing myself the luxury of dipping into the extra-textual. It seems warranted given the degree to which Lynch balances the unevenness of his filmic narratives with well-publicized support of Transcendental Meditation.

^{xlvii} Consider the “madness” of Artaud in relation to that which governs the lack of static identity in both Sarraute and Lynch: “And he undergoes every agony of the split personality, even to the point of craving purification by fire, death at the stake: ‘To this, I knew, my physical destiny was irremediably bound. I was ready for every agony of burning, and I awaited the first fruits of the flames, in view of a total combustion’”(quoted, Artaud, *Theater* 155).

^{xlviii} Granted, other characters are not so fortunate, a fact that I will address later.

^{xlix} See John Bennett (1991).

ⁱ There is an obvious irony in the centrality of the tree in so far as this relates to the Deleuzian rhizomatic model of “territory” and becoming. I would suggest, however, that the film's ethos presents an “asignifying rupture” (Deleuze, *Thousand* 9) of arborescence in so far as it challenges the centrality of language in the “process” of the developing character/subject.

ⁱⁱ *The Sacrifice* was made in the 1980's, when threat of nuclear war was especially topical.

ⁱⁱⁱ For example, the serial killer whose murders are accompanied by increasingly obvious clues as to his or her identity in the desire to be captured and quite possibly exterminated.

ⁱⁱⁱⁱ Granted, Deleuze's study of masochism was published 13 years prior to the original release of *A Thousand Plateaus*.

^{liv} The finger slammed in the car door; the knife that misses on the cutting board – such moments may be defined as transcendent in the way that I am outlining, with the obvious caveat that they lack consent.

^{lv} Compare with Kristeva's project of transforming the embodied “psychic realm” “through *linguistic activity* into a form of sublimation or into intellectual, interpretive, or transformational activity. At the same time,” she continues, “we must conceive of the ‘psychic realm’ as a *speech act*, that is, neither an acting-out nor a psychological rumination within an imaginary crypt, but the link between this inevitable and necessary rumination and its *verbal expression*” (my italics, *Portable* 211). For Kristeva, the primary dilemma afflicting the “new maladies of the soul” is the “inability to represent” discursively and affectively (ibid 208). Her own “gift of love,” then, however compelling, remains within the nebulous boundaries of words.

^{lvi} Of course, for Freud, “everything that affects us intensely becomes sexual, including pain and pleasure” (Phillips, *Defense* 34). I will address the pervasiveness and potential of sexual energy in chapter seven.

^{lvii} There are, I would suggest, two potential “deaths” in this procedure. The first is that of the capacity to function in a relatively sane and culturally-acceptable manner, the loss of sanity and the subsequent plunge into madness (Artaud). The second problematizes and abolishes erroneous assumptions that one holds about oneself, a comparatively productive death. Feldman is speaking primarily about aesthetic creation, though there is as much “life” at stake in encountering as in producing certain texts. The “danger” of art lies in the imperative to negotiate the fine line between these deaths.

^{lviii} Listening as a form of “somaesthetic” praxis will become evident in relation to the discussion of specific compositions.

^{lix} Another, less aggressive example of such noise music would be track five on Christian Fennesz’s +475637-165108 (1999) in which glistening, melodic shards of white noise rush at the listener at high volume, only to increase in volume and eventually putter out into fragmented surges of electricity.

^{lx} See Kim Cascone (2000) and Curtis Roads (??) for more details regarding origins and software techniques, respectively.

^{lxi} See Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” His emphasis on the Dadaist notion of “shock” is particularly relevant here in terms of the defamiliarization of the “waste products” of everyday sound. I will return to a different but related view of “shocks” in the next chapter.

^{lxii} By acoustic I mean to imply a use of field recordings, the manipulation of which does not completely obscure their original quality of spaciousness.

^{lxiii} For Lyotard, “the sublime is kindled [in part] by the threat of nothing further happening” (“The Sublime...” 251).

^{lxiv} Performances may be documented, of course. But the validity of this documentation, whether photographic, textual or video, must itself be called into question in so far as the document is distanced from the experiential, corporeal immediacy of the original event. Moreover, the same may be said regarding the extent to which the document is vulnerable to commodification and consequently, the abasement of its original, immediate significance.

^{lxv} Kathleen Speeth, in her *The Gurdjieff Work*, asserts that “personality even projects a God and prays to the projection” (82), recalling, in Derridian terms, the Transcendental Signified that is ever present behind Descartes’ *Discourse*....

^{lxvi} Compare with Richard Rorty’s characterization of the self – “a plurality of persons’ each with ‘incompatible systems of belief and desires’” (Quoted, Archer, *Being* 38).

^{lxvii} As I mentioned in relation to Beckett, the second of the Four Noble Truths of Buddhist philosophy states that all suffering is caused by desire and ignorance - the latter being based on the false notion that desire can be ultimately fulfilling or even, as in the Lacanian deconstruction of desire, “properly articulated.”

^{lxviii} Ordinarily, the suffering inherent to life is something to minimize, through sublimation or, less compelling, consumerism, rather than an energy to harness.

^{lxix} Any scholar writing on the subject of religious or therapeutic practice is faced with such difficulty. An example of one such effort is George Kalamaras’ *Reclaiming the*

Tacit Dimension, a study of silence in pedagogy and mysticism that grapples with the articulation of alternative modes of knowing. It does not require one to look very hard to locate a similar tension in analyses included here, especially in the Deleuzian texts in which the abstract “program” of becoming clearly requires an investment of oneself that exceeds the discourse of its enunciation.

^{lxx} A similar project is taken up by Charles Taylor in his historical contextualization of modern identity, *Sources of the Self*. Here the aim is to “understand better the standing areas of tension or threatened breakdown in modern moral culture” (498), the “hope” amidst such tension ultimately residing, for Taylor, in “Judaeo-Christian theism” (521).

^{lxxi} In her *Semiotexte* interview with Philippe Petit, Julia Kristeva describes her students as being less interested in “the technical works that super-achievers devoured during the 70’s and 80’s [than in the] Church Fathers, the mystics and the theologians” (91).

^{lxxii} See Ouspensky (1977), pg 26-27.

Bibliography

- Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." *Critical Theory Since 1965*. Eds. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle. Tallahassee: Florida State UP, 1992.
- Archer, Margaret S. *Being Human: The Problem of Agency*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.
- Artaud, Antonin. *The Theatre and its Double*. New York: Grove Press, 1958.
- Baldwin, James. "Sonny's Blues." *The Harper American Literature*, Vol. 2. Eds. Donald McQuade, et al. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1987.
- Barthes, Roland. *A Lover's Discourse*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: The Noonday Press, 1993.
- *Camera Lucida*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981.
- *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.
- *S/Z*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1974.
- Baugh, Bruce. "How Deleuze Can Help Us Make Literature Work." *Deleuze and Literature*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000.
- Beckett, Samuel. *Four Novellas*. London: John Calder, 1977.
- *Disjecta. Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*. Ed. Ruby Cohn. New York: Grove Press, 1984.
- Belsey, Catherine. "Constructing the Subject: Deconstructing the Text." *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Eds. Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer. New York: Longman, 1994.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.
- Bennett, J. G. *Gurdjieff: making a New World*. Santa Fe: Bennett Books, 1974.
- *Hazard*. Santa Fe: Bennett Books, 1991.
- Benveniste, Emile. "Subjectivity in Language." *Critical Theory Since 1965*. Eds. Hazard

-
- Adams and Leroy Searle. Tallahassee: Florida State UP, 1992.
- Blanchot, Maurice. "The Essential Solitude." *The Gaze of Orpheus and Other Literary Essays*. Trans. Lydia Davis. Ed. P. Adams Sitney. Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press, 1981.
- Bogue, Ronald. *Deleuze's Wake: Tributes and Tributaries*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2004.
- "Violence in Three Shades of Metal: Death, Doom and Black." *Deleuze and Music*. Eds. Ian Buchanan and Marcel Swiboda. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2004.
- Boxall, Peter. *Don DeLillo: The Possibility of Fiction*. London: Routledge, 2006.
- Brenkman, John. "The Other and the One: Psychoanalysis, Reading, the Symposium." *Yale French Studies*. 55/56, 1997.
- Broadhurst, Susan. *Liminal Acts: A Critical Overview of Contemporary Performance and Theory*. New York: Cassell, 1999.
- Butler, Judith. *The Psychic Life of Power*. Stanford : Stanford UP, 1997.
- Cage, John. *Silence*. London : Boyars, 1987.
- Camus, Albert. *The Outsider*. New York : Penguin Books, 1982.
- Cascone, Kim. "The Aesthetics of Failure: 'Post-digital' Tendencies in Contemporary Computer Music." *Computer Music Journal*, 24:4, Winter 2000.
- Cavarero, Adriana. *In Spite of Plato*. Trans. Serena Anderlini-D'onofrio and Áine O'Healy. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Certeau, Michel de. *La Culture au Pluriel*. 2nd ed. Paris: Christian Bourgeois, 1980.
- Chartier, Richard. "How Things Change." *For Morton Feldman*. Trente Oiseaux, 2002.
- Chion, Michel. *Kubrick's Cinema Odyssey*. Trans. Claudia Gorbman. London: BFI Publishing, 1999.
- Cortazar, Julio. *Around the Day in Eighty Worlds*. Trans. Thomas Christensen. San Francisco: North Point Press, 1986.
- *End of the Game*. Trans. Paul Blackburn. New York: Pantheon Books, 1967.
- Cowart, David. *Don DeLillo: The Physics of Language*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002.

-
- De Bolla, Peter. *Art Matters*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2001.
- Decant, Patrick. "Automatism and Consciousness." *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teaching*. Eds. Jacob Needleman and George Baker. New York: Continuum, 1996.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Essays Critical and Clinical*. Trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
----- *Negotiations*. Trans. Martin Joughin. New York: Columbia UP, 1995.
- Deleuze Gilles and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
----- *Anti-Oedipus*. Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane. New York: Viking, 1977.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Claire Parnet. *Dialogues*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Haberjam. Columbia UP, 2002
- DeLillo, Don. *The Body Artist*. The Body Artist. New York: Scribner, 2001.
----- *White Noise*. New York: Penguin, 1986.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976.
----- "Structure, Sign and Play." *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.
- Descartes, René. *The Method, Meditations and Philosophy*. Trans. John Vietch. Washington: Walter Dunne, 1901.
- Eyes Wide Shut*. Dir. Stanley Kubrick. Warner, 1999.
- Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. London: Longman, 1989.
- Feldman, Morton. *Give My Regards to Eighth Street*. Cambridge, Mass: Exact Change, 2000.
- Foster, Paul. *Beckett and Zen*. London: Wisdom Publications, 1989.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Foucault Reader*. Ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and its Discontents*. Trans. James Strachey. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1975.
----- *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*. Trans. Joan Riviere. New York: Garden City, 1943.

-
- *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. Trans. James Strachey. New York: Basic Books, 1975.
- Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday, 1959.
- Gunn, Paula Allen. *Life/Lines*.
- Günter, Bernhard. "un lieu pareil à un point effacé, 2eme partie." *Univers Temporel Espoir*. Trente Oiseaux, 1999.
- Gurdjieff, G. I. *Life Is Real Only Then, When I Am*. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1981.
----- *Views From the Real World*. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1975.
- Hasan, Ihab. "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism." *Postmodernism: A Reader*. Ed. Thomas Docherty. New York: Columbia UP, 1993.
- Hix, H. L. *Spirits Hovering Over the Ashes: Legacies of Postmodern Theory*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.
- Houle, Karen. "Micropolitics." *Gilles Deleuze: Key Concepts*. Ed. Charles J. Stivale. Montreal: McGill-Queens UP, 2005.
- Huxley, Aldous. *The Perennial Philosophy*. London: Triad Grafton, 1985.
- Incident at Lochness*. Screenplay by Werner Herzog and Zack Penn. Dir. Zack Penn. Fox, 2004.
- Jefferson, Ann. *Nathalie Sarraute: Fiction and Theory*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2000.
- Jay, Martin. *Downcast Eyes*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- Jones, Amelia. *Body Art/Performing the Subject*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.
- Kalamaras, George. *Reclaiming the Tacit Dimension*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1994.
- Kaustuv, Roy. *Teachers in Nomadic Spaces*. New York: P. Lang, 2003.
- Kornfield, Jack. *A Path with Heart*. New York: Bantam Books, 1993.
- Kristeva, Julia. *New Maladies of the Soul*. Trans. Ross Guberman. New York: Columbia UP, 1995.
----- "Postmodernism?" *Modernism/Postmodernism*. Ed. Peter Brooker. London:

-
- Longman, 1992.
- *Revolt, She Said*. Trans. Brian O’Keeffe. Ed. Sylvère Lotringer. New York: Semiotext(e), 2002.
- Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1977.
- *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1998.
- Luke, Timothy W. “From Body Politics to Body Shops: Power, Subjectivity, and the Body in an Era of Global Capitalism.” *The Politics of Selfhood*. Ed. Richard Harvey Brown. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
- Lyotard, Jean François. “The Sublime and the Avant-Garde.” *Postmodernism: A Reader*. New York: Columbia UP. Ed. Thomas Docherty, 1993.
- Miller, James. *The Passion of Michel Foucault*. New York: Simon and Shuster, 1993.
- Motte, Warren. *Small Worlds*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999.
- Muholland Drive*. Dir. David Lynch. Universal Studios, 2001.
- Mulvey, Laura. *Fetishism and Curiosity*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996.
- “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Eds. Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer. New York: Longman, 1994.
- Neroni, Hilary. Jane Campion’s *Jouissance: Holy Smoke and Feminist Film Theory*.” *Lacan and Contemporary Film*. New York: Other Press, 2004.
- Nicoll, Maurice. *The New Man*. Boston: Shambala, 1986.
- Nochimson, Martha P. “All I need is the Girl: The Life and Death of Creativity in *Muholland Drive*.” *The Cinema of David Lynch*. Eds. Erica Sheen and Annette Davison. London: Wallflower Press, 2004.
- Norris, Christopher. *Deconstruction, Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Ouspensky, P. D. *In Search of the Miraculous*. San Diego: Harvest Brace Jovanovich, 1977.
- *The Psychology of Man’s Possible Evolution*. New York: Vintage Books, 1981.
- Phillips, Anita. *A Defence of Masochism*. London: Faber and Faber, 1998.
- Pisters, Patricia. *The Matrix of Visual Culture*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003.
- Powell, Anna. *Deleuze and Horror Film*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2005.

-
- Prévost, Edwin. *Minute Particulars*. Essex: Copula, 2004.
- Rasmussen, Randy. *Stanley Kubrick: Seven Films Analyzed*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., 1975.
- Roads, Curtis. *Microsound*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004.
- Ruch, Allen B. "‘No hay banda:’ A Long, Strange Trip Down David Lynch’s Mulholland Drive." *The Modern Word*. http://www.themodernword.com/mulholland_drive.html.
- The sacrifice*. Dir. Andrei Tarkovsky. Kino, 1986.
- Sarraute, Nathalie. *Tropisms*. Trans. Barbara Wright. New York: George Braziller, 1963.
----- *You Don’t Love Yourself*. Trans. Maria Jolas. New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1990.
- Schafer, Roy. *Retelling a Life*. New York: Basic Books, 1992.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice*. Middlesex: Penguin, 1965.
- Shulman, Peter. *The Sunday of Fiction*. Indiana: Purdue UP, 2003.
- Shusterman, Richard. *Performing Live: Aesthetic Alternatives for the Ends of Art*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2000.
----- *Practicing Philosophy*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Silverman, Kaja. *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
----- *The Subject Of Semiotics*. New York: Oxford UP, 1983.
----- *The Threshold of the Visible World*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Smith, Paul. *Discerning the Subject*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.
- Sontag, Susan. "Film and Theatre." *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. 4th Edition. Eds. Gerald Mast, et al. New York: Oxford UP, 1992.
- Soitorin, Patty. "Becoming-woman." *Gilles Deleuze: Key Concepts*. Ed. Charles J. Stivale. Montreal: McGill-Queens UP, 2005.
- Speeth, Kathleen Riordan. *The Gurdjieff Work*. New York: Pocket Books, 1976.
- Stoller, Robert J. *Perversion*. New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc, 1975.
- Suzuki, D. T. "Lectures on Zen Buddhism." *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*. New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1960.

-
- Tarkovsky, Andre. *Sculpting in Time*. Trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994.
- Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989.
- Thoreau, Henry David. *The Portable Thoreau*. New York: Penguin Books, 1984.
- Toussaint, Jean-Philippe. *The Bathroom*. Trans. Nancy Amphoux and Paul De Angelis. New York : E. P. Dutton, 1990.
- Turkovskaya, Maya. *Tarkovsky: Cinema as Poetry*. Trans. Natasha Ward. London: Faber and Faber, 1989.
- Turner, Dennis. "The Subject of *The Conversation*." *Cinema Journal* 24, No. 4, Summer 1985.
- Wallace, B. Alan. *Tibetan Buddhism From the Ground Up*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1993.
- Webb, James. *The Harmonious Circle: The Lives and Works of G.I. Gurdjieff, P.D. Ouspensky, and their Followers*. New York: Putnum Publishing, 1980.
- Wellbeloved, Sofia. *Gurdjieff: The Key Concepts*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Wilson, Colin. *The Outsider*. Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc., 1982.