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SANTA CRUZ

**FLESHLY EMBODIMENTS: EARLY MODERN MONSTERS, VICTORIAN
FREAKS, AND TWENTIETH-CENTURY AFFECTIVE SPECTATORSHIP**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

LITERATURE

by

Sara E. S. Orning

June 2012

The Dissertation of Sara E. S. Orning
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ABSTRACT

Sara E. S. Orning

Fleshly Embodiments: Early Modern Monsters, Victorian Freaks,
and Twentieth-Century Affective Spectatorship

The primary theoretical concern in this dissertation is to put the embodied, non-Cartesian subject at the center of the emergence of the normative human body and the experience of affective spectatorship. My investigation is set against the backdrop of the ontological privileging of the human in Western culture since the Renaissance, and an aim of my analysis is to provide an account of how the human came to occupy this position. I draw in particular on Michel Foucault's genealogical method, which focuses on the emergence of phenomena instead of searching for their origins, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology to make a claim about the sustained effect of Descartes's *cogito* on how we conceive of our humanness and embodiment.

In the first part of the dissertation, I examine the development of humanness by looking at its relationship with monstrosity in popular and scientific literature from the mid-1500s to the late-1800s, especially Ambroise Paré's *On Monsters and Marvels* (1543) and nineteenth-century medical literature. From existing on a continuum with a range of other agents – animals, gods, monsters, nature – in early

modern Europe, the human gradually became the advantaged being towards the end of the seventeenth century and other agents ceased to matter in any meaningful way. This shift occurs around the same time as the emergence of a systematic anatomical knowledge of the so-called normal and abnormal human body, based on dissection. I argue that the normative body is challenged and deconstructed by the lived experience of the female, literary freaks in Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love* (1983) and Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984). They refuse the Cartesian split that enables the designation of normal or abnormal in the first place.

In the second part of the dissertation, I draw on phenomenological approaches to film, especially Vivian Sobchack's *Carnal Knowledge* (2004), and my own experiences as a spectator to formulate a theory of spectatorship built on embodied knowledge. In my examination of recent uncomfortable French films, such as *Romance* (1999), *The Piano Teacher* (2001), and *In My Skin* (2001), I argue that the affective, affected subject is key to theorizing cinema because it opens up for considering the lived body as a site for generating and interpreting knowledge. In conclusion, this study offers a corporeal history of the emergence of humanness, focusing especially on the trajectory of the mind/body split and ending with a call to revise our Cartesian vocabulary.

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I could not have completed this dissertation without the generous support of the Fulbright Foundation. I received additional financial support from the Norway-America Association, the UCSC Literature Department, the UC Institute for Humanities Research, and the University of California, all for which I am thankful.

My interest in early modern monsters and monstrous bodies was awakened in Margaret Healy's course "The Renaissance Body" at the University of Sussex in 2005. This interest became part of my dissertation after taking Carla Freccero's class "Humanism in the Making: Animals before/after Descartes" at UCSC in 2007. The dynamic, interdisciplinary research environment at UCSC, especially as represented by the Center for Cultural Studies with its weekly colloquium, various research clusters, and reading groups, further inspired and nurtured my research.

My gratitude goes to Allison Athens and Logan Walker, who, as my writing group, provided a weekly space for constructive feedback and overall support. They have seen this project through from brainstorming points to finished text. Nicky Falkof and Liz Sage have, as always, provided unfailing sustenance, both personal and academic. I am especially grateful to Erica Smeltzer for being a great friend and reading my work, and to Rakia Faber, Matthew Suazo, Martha Kenney, and Aliyah Khan for making my time in Santa Cruz so enjoyable. A heartfelt thanks goes to Lisa Lind, Erlend Blakstad Haffner, Martin Skar, and Ingunn Eriksen for never ceasing to urge me to come home. I thank Johanne Wernø for friendship and timely advice. Bonnie Rhee Andryeyev deserves a special debt of gratitude for her eternal optimism (she would call it realism), her faith in me, and academic and personal support.

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As for what motivated me, it is quite simple; I would hope that in the eyes of some people it might be sufficient in itself. It was curiosity – the only kind of curiosity, in any case, that is worth acting upon with a degree of obstinacy: not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what it is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself. After all, what would be the value of the passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeableness and not, in one way or another and to the extent possible, in the knower's straying afield of himself?

– Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Volume II*

INTRODUCTION: Humanity, Monstrosity, and Embodying non-Cartesian Flesh

Bodies have all the explanatory power of minds
– Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*

In this dissertation I formulate a genealogy of the constitution and experience of the subject that works against the binary structure of the Cartesian mind/body split. I do this by focusing on embodiment as a parallel domain to "the body" as inscribed, represented object. Embodiment can be understood as "neither a biological nor a sociological category but rather as a point of overlapping between the physical, the symbolic, and the sociological" (Rosi Braidotti 25). It is the condition of the lived body, which is experienced and made intelligible through its internal psychical life, embodied, knowledge, discursive formations, and social categories and imperatives. In order to be able to examine embodiment in its culturally interpretable instantiations, I focus on it as the domain through which we may ask questions about what underlies the symbolic and culturally interpretable body. This implies shifting the focus from how we interpret the body to how we live and experience the body.¹

Despite Foucault's masterful contributions, to historicize the body as an object does not help us heal the Cartesian split. One of the quiet, unspoken assumptions in

¹ My work is particularly indebted to the considerable work undertaken over the past three decades on the body and embodiment in cultural studies, sociology, and feminism.

the work on the body is that there is always an extra dimension to it that is not addressed through examination of signification practices only. There is something upon which we build all this knowledge of the body, something that is the very condition of our theorizing and meaning-making. In Adrienne Rich's words, the real difference lies between "the body" and "my body" in that the second takes into account the subjective notion of lived, embodied experience (215).

A central problematic within this larger concern is how we come to understand ourselves as embodied human beings. At first glance, this sounds like the widest possible angle one could take on the issue of embodiment: feeling human; that underlying, unspoken species identity we constantly live and carry with us as a basis for all other identity markers, is something most of us take for granted most of the time.² That is, we take it for granted except for the times we find ourselves on the margins of the human with the danger of entering the realm of the monstrous, whether it entails being perceived as less-than-human in bodily or mental faculties, or being overwhelmed by our own disorienting, monstrous affect.

The Cartesian influence on the genealogy I construct in this dissertation is twofold: the *cogito* not only made the human the sole rational being, it also split the human internally. As René Descartes wrote, "this ego, this soul, by which I am what I

² The quest for finding the defining feature of humanness is not new. Neither is it the aim of my research to isolate and define such a feature; that I leave to the wealth of fields currently engaged in that endeavor, such as neuroscience, primate research, psychology, communication theory, legal studies, philosophy, and literature, to mention a few. The brain, emotions, language, and laws are all focal points for finding that elusive quality that allegedly makes us human. Some of these investigations emphasize our similarity to other beings, yet most of them lean in the direction of defining the human as somehow exceptional, privileged, and unique in its position amongst other beings.

am, is entirely distinct from the body and is easier to know than the latter, and that even if the body were not, the soul would not cease to be all that it is now" (*Meditations* 21). The body was conceptualized as a complex machine, what Descartes called a "mere collection of limbs," animated by a common spirit. The result was that the human became the only possessor of reason, and the human mind the only agent of thought. Other orders of being, such as animals, gods, and monsters; other states of mind, such as madness³; and other agents, such as the body, were rendered passive and ineffectual as agents in the world.

My aim in this project is thus to trace the effects of mind/body dualism as they manifest themselves in the constitution and experience of embodied subjectivity. I construct a genealogy of non-Cartesian embodiment that begins in a pre-dualist, early modern context; continues with the Victorian period that consolidates the normative, Cartesian body; and ends with a return to non-dualist affective, embodied subjectivity in cinematic spectatorship. This is a genealogy in which the body occupies center stage rather than being a forgotten sideshow in the "real" story of abstract, human capabilities. Such a genealogy entails making the body not merely a passive effect of nature, waiting to be inscribed or left behind while the mind does the thinking, but an active, living being, in unity not only with the psychical processes but also with materiality – what Elizabeth Grosz calls not "a precultural, presocial, or prelinguistic pure body but a body as social and discursive object, a body bound up in the order of desire, signification, and power" (18-19).

³ See Foucault's *The History of Madness* (2006) for a fuller discussion of the Cartesian split's implications for madness.

It is precisely the body bound up in matrices of desire, signification and power that Foucault traces through history when he writes that "the body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration" ("Nietzsche" 83). The body is marked by its surface, the skin, which is not only a writing surface (adapted through centuries to different purposes) but a constructed and never quite stable place upon which we seek to inflict meaning: of identity, of same or other, of inside and outside. The flesh acts as the consolidating force for what Foucault (and much of poststructuralist theory) regards as the illusory unit of the self.⁴

Foucault's placement of the body at the center of larger historical developments, as he does particularly in *Discipline and Punish* and his three volumes on the *History of Sexuality*, serves as inspiration for this project. Foucault's genealogical method, which favors the emergence and effects of what he calls "epistemes" instead of the search for historical origins, proves particularly helpful in my examination and critique of the coming into being of the normative human body.⁵ Despite reservations about Foucault's elision of the concrete, lived body, my approach

⁴ Despite Donna Haraway's argument that the human body itself can be perceived as an illusory force, since only about 10% of its cells has human DNA, I adopt the fiction of the human body for now (*When Species Meet* 3-4).

⁵ Foucault writes that the episteme "may be suspected of being something like a world-view, a slice of history common to all branches of knowledge, which imposes on each one the same norms and postulates, a general stage of reason, a certain structure of thought that the men of a particular period cannot escape" (*Archaeology* 191).

to knowledge formation and its potential for ideological critique marks this project as fundamentally Foucauldian.

Foucault posits the body as the privileged site of larger historical transformations and quests for selfhood. But *which* body is understood in this account? It is a nameless but clearly human body, with no further specifications, a human body, taken for granted, that then goes on to be disciplined and inscribed. This, if we follow Bruno Latour, is what we have come to think of as the humanist subject, that is, "the free agent...the distressing visage of the human person...consciousness, the *cogito*, the hermeneut, the inner self" (136).

As Latour's inclusion of the *cogito* in his definition of the humanist subject shows, the mind is central to how we define a human being. We often base the definition of the human on abstract categories like the ability to reason, feel compassion, or live in freedom. For example, the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" and, "they are endowed with reason and conscience" (Article 1). The human is both born with certain characteristics and able to attain others through education and other types of betterment. Moreover, according to the Declaration, "[A]ll members of the human family" are eligible for this set of rights. By extension, "all members of the human family" are defined by being endowed with reason and conscience. While this definition of the human might be complicated by questions of classification and similarities between humans and, for example, primates, we still see

how certain abilities and freedoms, notably reason, conscience, and the right to develop one's character are made particular properties of humanity.

To recognize where the wording of the Declaration of Human Rights comes from, we have to move five hundred years back in time to some foundational humanist writings. The period referred to as the Renaissance in Western European history is the moment we think of as when many thinkers – philosophers, poets, writers, politicians – made the question of the specificity of the human their primary concern. What it meant to be a man – and thereby implicitly human – became a hotly debated topic, one that inhabited several discourses and, for today's readers, sometimes seemingly disparate fields of discussion.⁶ Diaries, essays, popular publications, and theological treatises from the early modern period all give us insight into how these discourses of the human were formed. Philosophers such as Petrarch, Pico della Mirandola, and Machiavelli addressed the potential of (the hu-)man, of one's relation to one's inner self, and the scope of man's abilities.

Pico's *On the Dignity of Man* (1486) is a paradigmatic text in the definition of the human. For him, "the reason why man is rightly said and thought to be a great marvel and the animal really worthy of wonder" (3-4) is that he is "confined by no bounds," and able to fashion his own boundaries (5). In Pico's text, God says to man,

"I have placed thee at the center of the world, that from there thou mayest more conveniently look around and see whatsoever is in the world... thou mayest sculpt thyself into whatever shape thou dost prefer. Thou canst grow downward into the lower natures which are brutes. Thou canst again grow

⁶ See Chapter 2 for an extensive investigation of the collapsing of "man" and "human."

upward from thy soul's reason into the higher natures which are divine."
(ibid.)

Here we see a motif in humanist thought that continues to be a silent assumption of contemporary understandings of the human: man (*sic*) is the center of all things, and has the best vantage point in relation to everything else. More importantly, it is man's ability to make of himself what he will that makes him superior. Pico writes, "[T]he seeds that each man cultivates will grow and bear their fruit in him. If he cultivates vegetable seeds, he will become a plant. If the seeds of sensation, he will grow into brute. If rational, he will come out a heavenly animal. If intellectual, he will be an angel, and a son of God" (5). Man exists in a continuum with all these other agents – plant, brute, angel – but is the only one of them who can *choose* to become either by cultivating his self. Thus, "we make the free choice" (Pico 7), an idea that we encounter again in the formulation of the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights and in contemporary ideas of what defines humanness.

Thus my investigation is set against the backdrop of the scrutiny of the category of the human, or as Vanita Seth puts it, "the ontological privileging of the human subject" ("Difference" 78). This scrutiny has taken place in various academic and non-academic fields over the last 20 years, for example in writings on "posthumanism."⁷ By questioning the species divide between humans and animals and the "speciesism" resulting from this, recent work in this field exposes and complicates some of the underlying assumptions of humanism, which is arguably the

⁷ For helpful entry points into this field, see the work of Donna Haraway (1990; 2004; 2008), N. Katherine Hayles (1999), Elaine L. Graham (2002), and Cary Wolfe (2003; 2009).

strongest ideological presumption of our self-understanding today. The investigation at hand is not an effort to undermine humanism, however, nor is it an argument against humanism per se. It is rather an attempt to historicize certain aspects of humanism, and to tell a different story of the rise of the human to the top of the ontological ladder.⁸

Part of the work I do in this dissertation is to argue for the fundamental non-dualist quality of human embodiment. I draw on the work of several theorists, most prominently Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Elizabeth Grosz, Vivian Sobchack, Didier Anzieu, Sigmund Freud, and Julia Kristeva, to claim that, as a living human subject, it is fundamentally impossible to be split into mind and body. If we consider embodiment from a phenomenological perspective, the body as experienced points us to knowledges gathered by and lived through the flesh. Embodied knowledges accompany and enable discursive knowledge and are both individually and culturally produced.⁹ A powerful aspect of the concrete, material body is thus its potency as the privileged subject-object through which we orient ourselves in the world. This orientation can be understood as related to how we conceive of our own, immediate

⁸ A concurrent project is the one (in many shapes and forms) questioning and historicizing the human/animal divide.

⁹ This idea has been and continues to be particularly important to feminist writers, such as Teresa de Lauretis (1987) and Donna Haraway (1991). What de Lauretis calls "technologies of gender" goes a long way in addressing the complex domain of subject formation by including hegemonic discourse, cultural production and consumption and subjective experience (*Technologies* 18).

existence in the world and to how we understand our connection to the "flesh of the world."¹⁰

The dissertation is divided into two parts; the first tracing the emergence of humanness from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, and the second examining embodied spectatorship in the encounter between the viewer and recent French films. In order to provide a model of non-Cartesian embodiment in a contemporary cinematic setting, it is necessary first to trace the historical conditions of possibility for this type of embodiment. Hence, I start my investigation by looking at genealogies of pre-Cartesian bodies and embodiments in early modern Europe before moving to the nineteenth-century, when we find the Cartesian body consolidated under the rubrics of normality and abnormality. This trajectory will then lay the foundation for undoing the Cartesian split in a more particular example, cinematic spectatorship. The subject in Part II can hence be read as both the embodied challenge to and potential unraveling of the trajectory of the human traced in Part I.

The selection of texts in this dissertation is reflective of the interdisciplinarity characterizing much work in literary and cultural theory. In Part I, I draw on a range of popular and philosophical sources on monsters from the early modern period, but also other broadsheets, pamphlets, and wonder books. Contemporary work on humans and monsters, especially that by Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, Marie-Hélène Huet, Jonathan Sawday, and Vanita Seth, illuminates the historical sources. From the proto-scientific literature of the early modern period I move to nineteenth-century

¹⁰ This is Merleau-Ponty's term, taken from *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968). I discuss Merleau-Ponty's concept of flesh at length in Chapter 4.

anatomical books, such as Henry Gray's *Anatomy* (1858) and Gould and Pyle's *Anomalies and Curiosities of Medicine* (1896), as well as photographs of dissections and twentieth-century work by George Canguilhem, Londa Schiebinger, Lennard Davis, and Ruth Richardson. Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love* (1983) and Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984) provide postmodern renditions of freakery, accompanied by Rosemary Garland Thomson and Robert Bogdan's seminal books on Victorian freak shows.¹¹

In Part II, I examine recent French films that focus on the body and embodied experience, often through the lens of sexuality and violence. I use the phenomenological film theory of Vivian Sobchack, Laura Marks, and Jennifer Barker; Patricia White's idea of "retrospectatorship"; and Linda Williams's work on "body genres" to challenge the psychoanalytically based film theory by Christian Metz. Affect theory by Sianne Ngai, Brian Massumi, and others is also part of the challenge to the Cartesian spectator. To examine skin and film, I use Didier Anzieu's work on the skin ego and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theory of embodiment. The work of Elizabeth Grosz, Michel Foucault, and René Descartes can be found throughout the dissertation.

Part I, "Genealogies of the Human," begins by tracing the contemporary, ideologically determined, inscribed, *material* body of the human back to its Humanist instantiations in early modern Europe. During this time, the body we now recognize as human was established through the expulsion of other bodies, deemed monstrous,

¹¹ I borrow the term "freakery" from Thomson's edited collection by the same name (1996).

divine, animal, or natural. Through this expulsion, the human body comes to be the only one with agency to act and think. How do monsters, which were frequent inhabitants of fairytales, proto-scientific treatises, and wonder books of the early modern period, gradually enter the discourses of medicine, anatomy, and pathology, as these emerged and rose to prominence? By examining this move, we will see that the idea of the "normal" body as human begins to take hold, a body indelibly marked by Cartesian dualism.

Chapter 1, "Humonstrous History: How the Monster Gave Us the Human," concentrates on how the categories of the human and the monstrous intersect in a range of popular and proto-scientific publications from roughly the mid-1500s to the late 1600s. In this material, especially Ambroise Paré's wonder book *On Monsters and Marvels* (1573), we see the processes by which monsters were created and understood. Women occupied particularly precarious positions in relation to monstrosity, both as potential creators of monsters through their overactive imaginations, and as occupants of inherently unstable, leaky bodies. Similar concerns over hermaphroditic bodies, which the medical and legal establishment considered threats on account of their ability to slide between genders, lead us to a shift toward the end of the early modern period: monstrous and human bodies were divested of their power to matter, thus rendered passive and open to anatomical exploration.

Chapter 2, "Female Freaks: Embodiment, Dissection, and Challenging the 'Man' in 'Human'," takes up the human/monster relationship as it was configured in the nineteenth century. During the early modern period, monsters were legitimate

objects of study in part because of the wonder they inspired. The decline of wonder coincided with the rise of classification in the eighteenth century, which made monsters classifiable entities within a larger system of natural objects. Rather than inspiring wonder in their singularity, the monstrous body inspired the study of deviations set against conceptions of the normal and the abnormal, especially worked out through the emerging disciplines of anatomy and dissection.

Examining nineteenth-century Anglo-American medical texts, I argue that the normative, human body came to be understood as male, white, and able-bodied. Females and non-whites were correspondingly constructed as deviant, usually because of their "abnormal" bodies and/or minds. Against the Victorian norm of the white, able-bodied male, I posit the postmodern, fictional body of the female freak from Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love* (1983) and Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984). By reading these figures together, I explore the transformations in the novels of nineteenth-century discourses on the normal and abnormal, and open up for the speculative implications of a utopian embodiment that could deconstruct our notion of the human.

In Part II, "Filmic Flesh and Permeable Boundaries," I investigate non-Cartesian, embodied subjectivity as it plays out in the cinematic spectator. The cinema has a particular ability to depict movement, and the human body has been a favorite moving object ever since film's inception. A factor in this centrality of the body to cinema is that film language has synaesthetic dimensions of meaning that exceed the linguistic, generating physical rejoinders in the audience. Despite film's

potential to move viewers in such complex ways, much film theory since the psychoanalytic turn in the 1970s has overlooked the physical body of the spectator as a viable part of the cinematic experience.

A significant exception to this is the phenomenological film theory initiated by Vivian Sobchack and subsequently developed by Laura Marks, Jennifer Barker, and Elena del R o. These theorists work to find meaning in the body that goes beyond reflexes and into corporeal sense-making. Challenging the focus on the non-corporeal in semiotic and psychoanalytic film analysis, for example, they attribute the power of understanding and the ability to generate and interpret knowledge to our skin and flesh. In keeping with this call to change how we do film analysis, Sobchack argues that

we need to alter the binary and bifurcated structures of the film experience suggested by previous formulations and, instead, posit the film viewer's lived body as a carnal "third term" that grounds and mediates experience and language, subjective vision and objective image – both differentiating and unifying them in reversible (or chiasmatic) processes of perception and expression. (*Carnal Thoughts* 60)

In Chapter 3, "The Embodied Spectator and the Uncomfortable Experience of Watching *Romance* and *The Piano Teacher*," I take my own spectating body as the "third term" through which I read Catherine Breillat's *Romance* (1999) and Michael Haneke's *The Piano Teacher* (2001). Considering the reactions I experienced in response to the two films, I argue for an approach to cinema that does not disavow the spectator's body, but takes into account both conscious and unconscious elements of

the spectatorial experience.¹² This approach entails centering a non-Cartesian, embodied spectator and her experiences of the filmic text.

Chapter 4, "Merging With Flesh," traces the negotiation of non-Cartesian embodiment in Marina de Van's *In My Skin* (2001). After having been made urgently aware of her materiality in an accident, the main character Esther begins exploring her own body by cutting into it.¹³ Contrary to accounts of the film that put Esther's elaborate cutting episodes and auto-cannibalism down to recognizable narratives of self-injury or other psycho-physiological problems triggered by living during late capitalism, I argue that Esther cuts her skin and flesh in order to reestablish a connection with what Maurice Merleau-Ponty calls the "flesh of the world."

The idea of the lived body as potentially excessive, never quite stable, and always both affective and affected is present throughout the dissertation. A corporeal curiosity about bodies – belonging to ourselves or others – that are somehow different, fascinating, pleasurable, and frightening runs as a red thread through all four chapters. This curiosity indicates the intimate connection between bodily experience and knowledge constitution in my project.

¹² By including the unconscious in my approach I depart somewhat from phenomenological film theory, which operates with non-conscious remainders in the body but not the unconscious as it appears in psychoanalytic film theory.

¹³ Esther never cuts herself in ways that (visibly) endanger her life. She seems to stay on the level of the epidermis, the outermost level of skin, and the dermis, the layer of skin just beneath the epidermis. Sometimes she delves into flesh too, but for the most part she concentrates on her skin.

PART I:
GENEALOGIES OF THE HUMAN

CHAPTER 1: Humonstrous History: How the Monster Gave Us the Human

We wear modern monsters like skin, they are us, they are on us and in us

– Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows*

"Monsters," writes Ambroise Paré in 1573, "are things that appear outside the course of Nature (and are usually signs of some forthcoming misfortune), such as a child who is born with one arm, another who will have two heads, and additional members over and above the ordinary" (3).¹⁴ Paré, a French barber-surgeon and important chronicler of monsters in the sixteenth century, puts the existence of monsters in relation to a nature that has a common course, but that is also possible to thwart, go outside of, or against. He describes two girls joined together at the kidneys, born in Verona in 1475, as a "spectacle of Nature," and speculates that sometimes there is no explanation for certain phenomena except "to say that Nature is disporting herself in her creations" (9, 107). Nature was a force to be reckoned with in Paré's

¹⁴ A note on how the term "monster" is used in this chapter: in the early modern literature, monster could refer to a range of different things, chiefly the following: exotic, mythological races (found in far-flung locales and reported since Antiquity by the likes of Herodotus and Pliny); composite, allegorical monsters (used especially to political effect in propaganda); babies born with corporeal defects (in the case of "monstrous births" and the maternal imagination); and intersexed people (or "hermaphrodites" in early modern terminology). Thus there are "figurative" and "real" monsters in this chapter, but both are subtended by the construction of monstrosity through the categories I examine.

text, as in early modern monster accounts in general. Gendered female, it represented the common course and order of the world. Yet as much as nature represented a certain order, it might also disport itself or create spectacles. Above all other beings and phenomena, monsters embodied these caprices of nature in early modern Europe.

If we compare Paré's view on nature and monsters to that of the French naturalist Clément de la Faille almost two hundred years later, it becomes clear that a different order of knowledge about natural phenomena reigns. In a letter to the Paris Académie in 1769, de la Faille is enraged by earlier naturalists' "blatant disregard for the 'natural order' – a disregard which...menaced a well-regulated world with monsters" (qtd. in Daston and Park 359). In its eighteenth-century incarnation, nature has become the natural order that is regulated by strict laws. It no longer produces spectacles or caprices but provides a regular, set course that has no place for menaces such as monsters.

From these two accounts, almost two hundred years apart, we begin to see a development that forms the backdrop of this chapter. As nature became more regimented and even enslaved by natural philosophy, the possibilities for wondrous, unique beings and portents mutated and moved into different spheres. In contrast to the proliferation of monster accounts across Europe during early modern times – infused with wonder, fear, and curiosity – monsters held no central place in a well-ordered, carefully regulated natural order, apart from that of the exception that proved the rules of nature.

In this chapter, I trace non-dualist embodiments back to Paré's pre-normative, early modern universe. In this universe, the human was not the privileged subject, but existed instead on a continuum with a range of other agencies – animal, human, demon, God, nature – between which the limits were permeable and unstable. I argue that the early modern period sees embodiments of the human, the monster, and combinations of the two that eventually disappear with dualist conceptions of embodiment in the late seventeenth century. Before the advent of Cartesianism, bodies and embodiments are more fluid: the maternal imagination could imprint monstrosity on a fetus, the female body could turn male, and monstrous babies could symbolize imbalanced nation states. As we see from these examples, women's bodies and minds were particularly prone to cross and blend boundaries, often in proto-scientific processes. Gender played a particular role in the relationship between the human and the monstrous since it was one of the most important distinctions of personhood at the time.¹⁵ Moreover, gender categories were beleaguered across much of early modern Europe, making the crossing of perceived gender boundaries a potentially monstrous act. The main attitude to this diverse world was wonder, which signaled curiosity, surprise, and pleasure at the wonderful things nature produced.

Towards the end of the early modern period, the limits between the human and the monster became more set. Bodies lost their ability to slip between genders or create monsters by using their imaginative faculties. This, I argue, is the result of

¹⁵ An inherent problem in using our contemporary categories of sex and gender, as Daston and Park note, is that these categories did not exist in the same form in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries ("Hermaphrodite and Order" 425).

Cartesian dualism divesting the body of its previous agency, splitting the embodied subject into an immortal soul and mere matter. This split opened up the possibilities of mining bodily matter for its truth in medical dissection.¹⁶ Both the human and the monster ended up on the surgeon's slab in the service of generating new knowledge about the body, but whereas the human body was mapped for its own intricate functions, the monster was not accorded the same attention to its specificity *as monster*. Instead, the monster was dissected for the knowledge it could provide about what came to be the only true, normal body: the human. Therefore I argue that tracing the genealogy of the human body through its relationship to the monster offers a material history of humanism. It is not the only story to tell about human exceptionalism and it is not meant to make the monster the only other to the human, but it is one way of reading the gradual privileging of the human towards the end of the early modern period and into the current moment.

In the early modern period, monsters existed on the same continuum as man, but only rarely do we find that monsters have the self-awareness attributed to man in, for example, Pico's writings, much less the power to make free choices.¹⁷ Nevertheless, they were beings with the power to frighten and delight, and thus made their mark in the Chain of Being. Monsters as such were nothing new in early modern

¹⁶ Dissection starts long before Descartes, of course, but I argue that dissection as a process that was looking for bodily truth (arguably introduced by Andreas Vesalius) gained a foothold only with the advent of the view of the body as inert and without agency.

¹⁷ An exception is "social monsters," such as cross-dressing women, who made the conscious choice to dress like men in order to obtain work or lead lifestyles not readily available to women at the time. Monsters born with unusual bodies or allegorical monsters are rarely described as having free choice, or any interiority at all.

Europe, as tales, images, and sightings of them had occupied popular religion and beliefs since Antiquity. What was new in this time period was the increasing proximity and familiarity of monsters, in particular the proliferation of monstrous births. The latter was a particular sub-category of monster lore that flourished in various published sources between the 1500s and the 1700s. In the category of monstrous births we find a remarkable multivalence of bodies, both monstrous and human, often mixed together in interesting variations. Because of this, monstrous births yield particularly good material for considering the not-always-stable boundaries and lines of demarcation between what was considered human and non-human. In addition, the coexisting frameworks of explanation we find in the category of monstrous births, ranging from divine to proto-scientific, makes this particular category dominant in this chapter.¹⁸

Scholarship on early modern monsters and marvels produced over the last twenty to thirty years has yielded an interesting and multifaceted field that encompasses, for example, monsters and their relation to the imagination (Marie-Hélène Huet 1993); monsters as identifiable medical phenomena (Alan Bates 2005); reading the monster through discourses of reproduction (Kathleen P. Long 2006); the exploration of wonder and marvels in aesthetics (James Mirollo 1999); and how wonder, monsters, and the emergence of modern science are related (Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park 2001). Many of the same original sources are used in these works,

¹⁸ I do not concentrate on the full range and wealth of marvels and prodigies recorded in this period. Showers of wheat, comets, volcanic eruptions, and sea monsters make few appearances in this chapter. Monsters, including monstrous births and hermaphrodites, are rather the focus of my investigation.

but often fairly differently: for example, while Bates thinks that it is impossible to avoid the question of what early modern monsters "really were" from today's medical perspective and thus tries to identify what he sees as the pathological conditions of individual monsters, Daston and Park are more interested in how monsters provide a way of thinking about overlapping reactions to the wonder-full at large, as examples through which we can read how these reactions changed over time.¹⁹

I draw on all of these approaches, but add my own way of reading the monstrous body; namely, I suggest the construction of a genealogy of the human body by looking at its relation to the body of the monster. My approach to the question of the monster and the human thus does not entail pronouncing definitive judgments on what the monster really meant or really was, either within a symbolic or a medical framework. I read into the silences or gaps in the stories about monstrous births: the not-quite-spelled-out consequences for the status of the human in these accounts, and how this status is changeable and contingent upon its relation to other types of beings. There is a progressive, linear story in this chapter – how the monster made its way from prodigy to pathological specimen – but I want to temper this unidirectionality by arguing that certain categories of beings and emotions carry over into later centuries, albeit in different forms and framed by different understandings. The monster may occupy the position of anatomical error by the nineteenth century, but some of the wonder it inspired in early modern Europe can be found, however

¹⁹ Bates is not alone in his inclination: at the back of the 1982 translation of Paré's *On Monsters and Marvels*, Philip D. Pallister, M.D., and William B. Jackson, M.D., attempt to identify what they see as the real medical conditions of as many of the monsters in the book as possible, building on the earlier identifications by Paré's biographer, Paul Delaunay.

transformed, in Victorian freak shows. Thus, this is a story of the bodies themselves, monstrous and human, and how they are constructed through the power of definition and reaction in my two time periods.

TEXTS AND CONTEXT

What we see in accounts of monsters from roughly the fifteenth to the seventeenth century is a proliferation of limits between man and other beings. As Vanita Seth argues, the human subject is not a privileged locus of agency but one among several orders of being with power to act ("Difference" 78). This intermingling of agents is characteristic of the monster accounts of the time and attests to what Seth calls "a world within which the boundaries between humans, gods and nature are porous and fluid" (ibid. 79). The medieval idea of the Chain of Being, where man was situated between the angels and the animals, lingered. There was a multitude of agents on earth and in the heavens to which people related their immediate existence.

Monsters appeared in an early modern European context marked by deep religious upheaval, for example, the conflicts between the Catholic Church and the reformed churches that neither began nor ended with the Reformation. There were also continual smaller or larger conflicts between nations or groupings within one country, unpredictable harvests, and multiple outbreaks of plague. Conflict, disease, and hunger were indeed the "three cataclysmic ills from which good Christians prayed that their God would deliver them" (Sheldon Watts 24). Living in a world

where so many facets of life were difficult to control for the individual brought a feeling of always-imminent instability. Such instability could arrive in the form of roaming bands of unemployed soldiers who might hold whole towns ransom, failing local harvests that could leave families to die of hunger, or unpredictable outbreaks of contagious disease. Since people themselves had no control over these events, there were a number of agents they could pray to or count on to have more power over the situation than they themselves did.

According to Watts, "ordinary unregenerate early modern Europeans" living outside of the cities operated with a set of supernatural, preternatural, and natural forces at work, a mix of pre-Christian and Christian customs, rather than what he terms the more urban, "authentic" Christianity, which required its subjects to submit completely to doctrine, to believe in original sin, and to accept everything that God might do to them (164-165). The demands made of super- or preternatural forces ranged from good health and protection of human fertility, to the securing of a good harvest, healthy animals, protection from fire, and the arrival of enough rain. A wealth of customs, phrases, spells, and other tools were used to communicate with these agents, with variable outcomes. If the desired outcome did not take place, for example, if the harvest failed, it was a matter of the ritual not being performed properly, rather than because of a lack of rain (ibid. 166). In other words, chance or a mechanistic view of causality was not included in the list of valid reasons for failure.

Hence, as Helen Parish and William Naphy put it, "[T]he early modern cosmos was governed by often unpredictable supernatural sources, and in the drive to

control, understand, and influence this magical universe, the genesis of popular rituals lay in the realms of magic, religion, and superstition" (10). At the time, "superstition" became a generic term used in debates, often berated and simplified, "belying the complexity of its meaning, and the virtual impossibility of reaching a watertight definition of what was (or was not) a superstitious act" (ibid. 5). On the one hand, there was a strong political-religious undercurrent that sought to divorce superstition from the new, "pure" Protestant understanding of Christianity since certain parts of the reforming church thought superstition represented older popular beliefs closely bound to Catholicism. On the other, religious practice was so infused and mixed up with acts that might fall into the "superstition" category that it proved hard to draw a definitive line between what was superstitious and what was not (Robert Scribner 15).

This was not only a conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism, but also indicative of a large gap between the faith of theological scholars and the faith held by common people. While theologians focused on Christ as God's son and the doctrine as it was written down in the Bible, people of less education, who rarely read the Bible, generally believed in a range of powers that could influence their lives and often had deep, personal relationships with particular saints and relics (ibid. 13). Thus the complexity of the early modern religious worldview came to a certain extent from the intermingling of agents in popular belief. In addition to a God increasingly seen as almighty, nature was an agent in itself, as were a number of saints, spirits, demons, and other lesser or higher powers.

This is to indicate that the Reformation was neither a unified nor unequivocal movement towards "rationalization" of the world. Rather, Scribner argues, "it carried along in its train a good deal of baggage from the pre-Reformation world: belief in saints, holy men, thaumaturgy, miracles, prophets and prophesies, the imminence of the Last Days, the powerful activity of the Devil in the world," and so on (xii). The sensibility in what Scribner calls "baggage from the pre-Reformation world" is a rich mix of sensory, sensual, and communal contexts in which various agents – not just God alone – played important roles. Religious practice included objects, which held importance in themselves as signs, portents, or protective charms. When monsters appeared in this context, then, they were circumscribed by a complex network of belief and symbolic relations that people were used to maintaining with a variety of natural and supernatural agents.²⁰

These details from early modern religious life point us to a society in which the supernatural did not belong exclusively to the realm of strict religious practice, and where the material, lived world was very much intertwined with supernatural and preternatural spheres. As portents, monsters were paradigmatic objects in the overlapping areas of religion and superstition. According to Parish and Naphy, "dreams, portents, prodigies and providences seemed to satisfy the continued expectations of the people that God had communicated with his people and would continue to do so through material objects and in the natural world" (15-16). As the

²⁰ Both this many-faceted relationship to a multitude of powerful agents and the trust in signs, objects, and extraordinary events continue through the early modern period and into the nineteenth century (Maxwell-Stuart 170).

many examples of prodigies reported before, during, and after the Reformation indicate, monsters continued to be part of people's practice of communication with non-human agents for a long time.

We thus see the importance of the unusual, wonderful, and miraculous in the social organization of early modern Europe. As Stephanie Lundeen puts it, "the early modern worldview took its cue not from the ordinary but rather from the prodigious event" (155). Uncommon events, including the existence of monsters and prodigies, were actively interpreted in different directions and attributed to a wide range of agents. In a context where everyday life was potentially turbulent and uncontrollable by the common man and woman, people were inclined to interpret many different beings and incidents as signs and portents with the power to tell what would happen to their particular region. Given the regional conflicts of the time and considering monsters' perceived power to carry warnings of divine wrath, European Christians treated prodigies "as almost invariable harbingers of locally targeted divine retribution in response to human sin" (Daston and Park, *Wonders* 181).

Monsters can thus be found serving several functions in the social fabric, playing highly symbolic roles in political and social affairs. Their bodies were interpreted and made to matter in cases where the evidence of God's wrath was needed in support of, or against, certain political or religious positions, such as in Luther's protest against the Catholic Church.²¹ Their bodies were also crucial in

²¹ In 1523, Martin Luther and his political advisor, Philip Melanchton, created much political furor with their publication of "Deutung der cwo grewlichen Figuren," woodcuts depicting the Pope-ass and the Monk-calf, two allegorical monsters designed to represent Catholic

imagery accompanying the body politic of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries across Europe.²² The use of monsters in political and religious conflict included not only allegorized composite monsters like Luther's Pope-ass, but also deformed babies like "the monstrous child of Fulham" from 1554. Its great head was taken as a sign of a kingdom in imbalance, where the head (the king) "sucke[s] out the wealth and substaunce of the people (the politike body) and kepe[s] it bare, so that it shall not be hable to help it self" (John Ponte qtd. in Margaret Healy 161). There existed a whole range of corporeal pathologies pertaining to conflicts at the time, all centered either on likening individual monstrous bodies to unbalanced, corrupt state bodies, or on one monstrous body standing for the sins of the state and its religious affiliations.²³ These were some of the ways monsters – purely symbolic or the result of documented births – were intimately intertwined with social, political, and religious events of their time.

The attention to monsters manifested itself in many parts of the public sphere in early modern Europe, supported by the rise and proliferation of print media from the newly invented and fast growing printing presses during this period. The reading public increased exponentially. According to Mary Fissell, about half of English men

depravity and greed. The woodcuts were reproduced and widely circulated, adding fuel to the fire of religious and political upheaval.

²² Throughout the early modern period, politics played a vital role in explaining the births and existence of monsters. Margaret Healy (2002), David Cressy (2004), and Julie Crawford (2005) all record a prominent presence of monsters in the politically unstable England in the 1600s, as do Katharine Park and Lorraine Daston (1981) in central Europe around the time of the Reformation, and Joan Landes (2004) in France during the revolutionary years of the late eighteenth century.

²³ Such imagery built on the medieval idea of "the King's two bodies," as Ernst Kantorowicz's well-known book of the same name analyzes (1957). It could also be said to look forward to Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651), in which the state is likened to a body.

and a third of English women were literate by 1700 (7). Based on her research into early modern print culture, Fissell claims that "[P]eople at all social levels read cheap print," and that people who read popular medical books also read a range of other publications, such as pamphlets and broadsides (ibid.). The literate population was not the only projected public for monster stories as it was common to read aloud and sing for those who could not read. In other words, the range of people who consumed print publications was substantial, as was the range of publications they consumed. The educational and material conditions were therefore in place to make monster publications the mass entertainment genre it became.

One of the genres made accessible by the new printing techniques, which can be said to be emblematic of the early modern monster tradition, was the so-called wonder book. Wonder books were popular all over Europe, providing a genre for collecting a wide range of marvelous and monstrous phenomena.²⁴ Such books mixed accounts of monstrous births with sightings of marvels and portents, for example, comets, showers of wheat or blood, recordings of people who did not take sustenance for years, and women who gave birth to multiple – sometimes hundreds – of children in one birth. Many of them also recorded events in plant growing, animal husbandry, and demonology. Wonder books were produced across the continent, and included Giambattista della Porta's *Magiae naturalis* (1558) from Italy, Pierre Boaistuau's *Histoires prodigieuses* (1560) and Ambroise Paré's *Des monstres et prodiges* (1573)

²⁴ Early modern wonder books had their forerunners in the medieval genre of entertainment literature drawing on the encyclopedic tradition of the ancient world, called paradoxology. This was a collection of oddities, including monsters, hybrids, distant races, marvelous lands, as well as antique notions of portents and omens that invoked a sense of dread (Bynum 53).

from France, and William Turner's *A compleat history of the most remarkable providences both of judgment and mercy, which have hapned in this present age* (1697) from England.

Of these, Paré's *On Monsters and Marvels* (*De monstres et prodiges*) is exemplary of the tradition in which the earlier separated categories of "individual monsters" and "exotic species" became mingled with regards to their classification and perceived origin, and where we see an increasing rate of monsters reportedly being born closer to home. If we follow Paré, the orders of the living can be divided roughly into animals, humans, demons, God, and nature, a common division of beings for his time. Monsters could be a mix of these orders, or a deformation or unusual variety within one of them. The classification scheme Paré employs positions nature – or Nature – as the main benchmark against which one judges monsters and marvels. In that, he shows his allegiances to earlier theories of monsters, especially Aristotle's. Even though God is actively involved in several of the subcategories of monsters and marvels Paré traces, there is a lack of divine involvement in his two main categories of monsters and marvels. This absence signals Paré's interest in proto-scientific explanations, yet a modern scientific sensibility and classification system are still far off.

Paré, like other wonder book authors, built extensively on earlier editions of wonder books in repeating stories recorded by other authors, as well as going back to ancient and medieval sources, especially Aristotle, Pliny the Elder, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas. Different theories and categories stood side by side, as we see in

On Monsters and Marvels where a section on monsters resulting from an imbalance in seed (a clearly Aristotelian idea) is presented next to examples of the wrath and glory of God (echoing Augustine), and "moral monsters," like beggars posing as lepers, evincing a socio-cultural aspect of certain monstrosities. As will be made clear below, the lack of consensus as to which model of explanation of monstrous beings was the "right one" places Paré's book in a long teratological tradition that waned after the early modern period. Several possible explanations for monsters existed side-by-side: political, religious, proto-scientific, and socio-cultural. This coexistence of different explanations may be ascribed partly to the explanations of monsters inherited from earlier writers, and partly to the fact that monsters inhabited a large number of discourses during the time in which Paré wrote.

Aristotle and Augustine provided the two main theories of monstrosity that various wonder book authors took up, repeated, and mixed together. Aristotle's proto-materialist theory about the creation of monsters appears in the context of his larger theory of reproduction, which is grounded in the balance of matter from the two sexes. In *On the Generation of Animals*, Aristotle makes his way to monstrosities by first considering the processes by which children come to resemble their parents:

(1) Some children resemble their parents, while others do not; some being like the father and others like the mother, both in the body as a whole and in each part, male and female offspring resembling father and mother respectively rather than the other way about. (2) They resemble their parents more than remoter ancestors, and resemble those ancestors more than any chance individual. (3) Some, though resembling none of their relations, yet do at any rate resemble a human being, but others are not even like a human being but a monstrosity. For even he who does not resemble his parents is already in a

certain sense a monstrosity; for in these cases Nature has in a way departed from the type. (100)

Nature's "type" is here the model for a successful reproductive process, and resemblance is the benchmark according to which monstrosity is measured. Resemblance is thus first grounded in *family* resemblance (parents, then remoter ancestors) before the issue of monstrosity as blurring the very category of the human crops up. To the modern reader with modern classificatory systems in mind, it might be somewhat unexpected to go directly from lacking resemblance to one's parents to lacking resemblance to anything human at all. Yet in Aristotle's theory of reproduction, both qualify as monstrosities because they depart from the natural type of the reproductive process. Being monstrous could therefore mean not resembling your parents or not resembling a human being at all.²⁵

Many aspects of Paré's classification system are similar to the Aristotelian view of monsters as "what does not usually happen in nature," of deviations from the type. In his *Physics*, Aristotle describes how these deviations may come about through likening the processes of nature to the operations of language:

Now mistakes come to pass even in the operations of art: the grammarian makes a mistake in writing and the doctor pours out the wrong dose. Hence clearly mistakes are possible in the operations of nature also. If then in art there are cases in which what is rightly produced serves a purpose, and if where mistakes occur there was a purpose in what was attempted, only it was

²⁵ In a foreshadowing of sorts for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century taxonomies, Aristotle's recognition of the importance of looking like one's immediate family in order to belong to the group echoes the future ordering of beings in evolutionary theory. The emphasis in both is on the common course of nature and various deviations from it, rather than, say, processes involving divine intervention.

not attained, so must it be also in natural products, and monstrosities will be failures in the purposive effort. (39)

Here monsters are outcomes of nature that are not supposed to happen because they do not fulfill the purpose of creation. Nature is likened to human agents, such as grammarians or doctors, with an intention and an aim. Just like these fallible humans, nature is not immune to "failures" along the way to its aim. Aristotle's version of monstrosities thus relies on a concept of the perfect or ideal form, as well as a process that usually follows a certain course. Deviations from this form are mere accidents of nature, failures in the process that otherwise goes smoothly towards the purpose of the creature in question.

Augustine, conversely, does not consider an imbalance of matter the driving cause behind monstrosities, but argues rather that God's all-encompassing power lets him create both wonders and monsters. In a passage from *The City of God*, Augustine cites an example from Varro about a celestial portent that changes its "color, size, form, course," and which consequently was seen as being "contrary to nature" (429). Yet Augustine does not agree with such a definition of portents: "For we say that all portents are contrary to nature; but they are not so. For how is that contrary to nature which happens by the will of God, since the will of so mighty a Creator is certainly the nature of each created thing? A portent, therefore, happens not contrary to nature, but contrary to what we know as nature" (ibid.). Drawing the distinction between what nature *is* and what we *know* of nature, Augustine places the definitive power to transform and create portents in God's hands. In other words, humans cannot judge

any prodigy or phenomenon as "unnatural" just because it is unfamiliar to us. It is ultimately God who may play with changing natures:

As therefore it was not impossible to God to create such natures as He pleased, so it is not impossible to Him to change these natures of His own creation into whatever He pleases, and thus spread abroad a multitude of those marvels which are called monsters, portents, prodigies, phenomena, and which if I were minded to cite and record, what end would there be to this work? (431)

In Augustine's view, then, monsters and prodigies constitute the very evidence of God's unlimited powers, powers at which humans can merely marvel.

We find a paradigmatic example of the interplay of Aristotle's materialist model and Augustine's divine model of monstrosity in Michel de Montaigne's account "A Monstrous Child" in Book II of the *Essays*. Writing in the late 1570s, Montaigne, who drew on the work of the ancients but ultimately held a natural philosophical view of the world, recounts how he met a child that was exhibited by two men and a woman because of its "strangeness." The child seemed of ordinary shape apart from the fact that "below the breast he was fastened and stuck to another child, without a head, and with his spinal canal stopped up, the rest of his body being entire" (653-4). After providing more details about how the child's body was put together, Montaigne begins speculating as to its cause. Evincing to begin with a decidedly Augustinian view, he writes that "what we call monsters are not so to God, who sees in the immensity of his work the infinity of forms that he has comprised in it," and further, "from his infinite wisdom there proceeds nothing but that is good and ordinary and regular; but we do not see its arrangement and relationship" (654). Here God's will to

create different forms is seen as the "good and ordinary and regular," shaping a natural law of sorts that is nevertheless not immediately available to human understanding. Humans just have to accept that God holds the ultimate power to create all beings and to trust that there exists a network of relationships between them, even though we do not see it.

In the next paragraph, however, Montaigne seems to change course towards an Aristotelian model of monstrosity when he writes that "[W]e call contrary to nature what happens contrary to custom; nothing is anything but according to nature, whatever it may be. Let this universal and natural reason drive us out of the error and astonishment that novelty brings us" (654). The idea of custom is dominant in Aristotle's idea of the monstrous as that which goes against nature's custom or type. In this second explanation, Montaigne urges us to overcome our "astonishment" of novelty and see it all as part of nature. What he calls "universal and natural reason" should be enough to dispel wonder, an idea that anticipates Descartes's forays into reason and the imagination a century later. Montaigne's account, like Paré's, provides another example of how explanations relying on faith and explanations that required inquiry into material processes of reproduction (both viewpoints evinced in ancient texts) coexisted without visible tension in early modern texts on monsters.

When it came to the overarching categories of extraordinary beings and events recorded in wonder books, there was a two-pronged teratological tradition that put individual wonders in one category and exotic species in another (Daston and Park, *Wonders* 175). Individual wonders included earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, comets,

and celestial apparitions, and were most often interpreted as prodigies: signs of human sin and the wrath of God. The second category spoke to the long history of exotic species found at the "margins of the world," reported by writers like Pliny and Herodotus, and subsequently repeated in many writings on monsters all through the early modern period. Examples included the dog-headed Cynocephali, the one-legged Sciapodes, and the headless Blemmyes. From travel accounts beginning with Herodotus's *Histories* from the fifth century BC, written descriptions of monstrous and exotic races, often accompanied by pictures, made an entire world of far-away monsters and exotic species available to medieval and early modern Europeans. Reports of monsters from the New World added to this tradition, which continued providing accounts of wondrous and monstrous beings in travel literature through the sixteenth and into the seventeenth century.

At the turn of the sixteenth century, what Daston and Park call "the dramatic emergence of the prodigy tradition" meant that the two traditions of individual wonders and exotic marvels merged (*Wonders* 175). This merger entailed a steep rise in prodigies being reported born and witnessed not only in far-flung corners of the world, but across Europe as well. Individual monsters, like babies with too few or too many limbs or human-animal hybrids, began to join the Cynocephali, Sciapodes, and Blemmyes in wonder books. As Cornelius Gemma lamented about monstrous races in 1575, "[I]t is not necessary to go to the New World to find beings of this sort; most of them and others still more hideous can be found here and there among us, now that the rules of justice are trampled underfoot, all humanity flouted, and all religion torn

to bits" (qtd. in *ibid.*). Invoking the extensive political use of monster imagery, Gemma's complaint not only points at the monstrosity of social change, but to the fact that the monster was coming closer to home.

Thus, what characterizes monster accounts in the early modern period is that monsters ceased to be the property of far-away lands only, but also started appearing in environments local to the authors who wrote about them. Regular people with no access to traveling, and without official affiliation to the church, nobility, or medical profession, now reported witnessing monstrous births, or seeing celestial phenomena, or enduring showers of wheat or blood. For example, Paré notes a monster being born "in the parish of Bois-le-Roy, in the Forest of Bière, on the road to Fontainebleu... The father's name is Esme Pétit and the mother Magdaleine Sarboucat" (41-42). This painstakingly detailed geographical description stands in contrast to the often secondhand tales of monstrous races in earlier accounts.

Furthermore, mentioning the parents by name signals that this is not an example of an exotic, monstrous race, but rather that of a monstrous birth. The move of monsters not only to the local sphere but to the most private of spheres – childbirth – signaled a turn in how monsters were defined and thought of. First of all, the distance afforded by monstrous races in faraway lands was no longer available in the case of monstrous births. It entered daily life both through the prevalence and use of print editions of ballads and stories, and through the chance to witness the birth of an actual monster. More so than in the case of exotic species in faraway lands, the chance was there to come face to face with a monster, and not just read or hear about

it.²⁶ As will be explored in more detail below, the new closeness of monsters also meant that their generation became intimately linked with the human reproductive process and thus with women in particular.

A consequence of the new closeness of monsters was that witnesses and their reactions became a factor in monster accounts. Witnesses could be ordinary people, such as neighbors, midwives, and citizens of the village or the city, or of higher professional or religious standing, such as princes, cardinals, kings, and even the pope.²⁷ For example, Montaigne reports to have seen not only a monstrous child but also Germain Marie, a woman who was said to have turned into a man while jumping over a ditch (Paré claims to have met the same man). A personal sighting such as this was one way to validate particular examples, but secondhand witnesses worked just as well. In the broadside ballad "The true fourme and shape of a monstrous Chyld Which was borne in Stony Stratforde, in North Hampton Shire" from 1565, we read that "this Childe was brought up to London, wheare it was seene of dyvers worshipfull men and women of the Cytie, And also of the Countrey" (Elderton). The purpose of this sighting was "To witnes that it is a Trough and no fable, But a warninge of God to move all people to amendment of lyfe" (ibid.). The prodigious

²⁶ Although how much more of a chance is of course arguable. Alan Bates remarks about the reports of congenital malformations in Elizabethan ballads that "[C]onjoined twins, one of the rarest malformations encountered in modern practice, account for almost half of these case reports. Unless they truly were commoner at this time, which seems unlikely, the excess of cases is presumably due to the peculiar fascination that conjoined twins have always exercised" ("Birth Defects" 206-207).

²⁷ Paré recounts that in 1493, a child conceived by a woman and a dog was deemed important enough to be sent to the pope. Similarly, a monster found inside an egg in 1569 was sent to King Charles, who was "eager to receive it."

message of this monster to warn people to mend their ways was made all the stronger by its body being seen by multiple witnesses.

A second factor in the increasingly personal relationship with the unusual body was the reaction of wonder on the part of the spectator.²⁸ For example, we read in Paré about the chambermaid who, upon cracking an egg and finding a monstrous head inside, "was frightened and full of wonder" (13). Words like "wonder", "admiration", "fear", and "marvel" turn up at various intervals in the stories and ballads, indicating that reactions to monstrous apparitions were complex and often composed of feelings a modern audience might see as contradictory. Such mixed feelings rose in response to an equally heterogeneous range of objects. According to Caroline Walker Bynum, wonder in the early modern context was "induced by the beautiful, the horrible, and the skillfully made, by the bizarre and rare, by that which challenges or suddenly illuminates our expectations, by the range of difference, even the order and regularity, found in the world" (69). This stands in contrast to wonder as it is presented in the Aristotelian tradition, in which it was generated by a problem one encountered, which proceeded to dissipate once the solution to that problem was found (Platt 15). Aristotle's version of wonder was seen to petrify the spectator, but simultaneously demand an explanation. With this explanation, "emotion subsides and order prevails" (Cunningham quoted in *ibid.*). This narrative always ended with the containment of the original discomfort generated by the wonder-full thing at hand,

²⁸ Wonder had a long, varied history in literature and philosophy before its early modern instantiations. See Daston and Park (2001) and Bynum (1991) for details. Wonder attained an important position in several early modern discourses, especially in relation to monsters and marvels, hence the inclusion of it here.

thereby making it subservient to and conquerable by curiosity and methodical explanation.

Making the distinction between wonder as a response to something that could be fantastic, attractive, and terrifying alike, and wonder as an emotional reaction to something that was initially inexplicable, but then explained and thus defused, plays an important role when considering the monster's trajectory from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. Wonder in the sense that Bynum defines it indicates that the monster was experienced across several categories of emotion and definition. Hence, the chambermaid in Paré's story could be frightened *and* full of wonder when encountering a monstrous head inside an egg. These two reactions were neither mutually exclusive nor exactly the same, but complimented each other when elicited by something full of wonder. In the Aristotelian category of wonder, monsters *mean* something different: they become momentarily able to stun the spectator, but are quickly divested of their unknowability, and hence their capacity for eliciting wonder, when they are explained and categorized.

We find an instructive example of how wonder in the sense of encompassing contradictory feelings works in the story of the two Italian brothers John Baptist and Lazarus Colloretti. Lazarus was John's parasitic twin, that is, he grew out of John's abdomen and was of the size of a small child.²⁹ They were reputedly born in 1617 and enjoyed a long career across Europe, where they showed themselves for money. The

²⁹ The brothers' story is recounted in several sources, and their names change from source to source: in the ballad in *The Pack of Autolykus*, Lazarus is the parasitic twin, while in Turner's *A Compleat History*, Lazarus is the full-grown brother.

story is repeated by several authors, such as Fortuni Liceti and William Turner, and was recorded in the ballad "The two inseparable brothers" in *The Pack of Autolykus*, a collection of popular ballads written between 1624 and 1693. Wonder is first mentioned in the description of the body of Lazarus, the parasitic twin:

This head and face is rightly fram'd,
With euery part that can be nam'd,
 eares, eyes, lips, nose, and chin,
His vpperlip hath some beard on't,
Which he who beares him yet doth want,
 this may much wonder win.
 (verse 6, lines 1-6, p 11)

In this verse, it is not Lazarus's small stature or the fact that he is physically attached to his brother that primarily inspires wonder; indeed, he has "every part that can be named." Rather, wonder arises at the observation that he has facial hair, something his big brother does not. In this instance, then, wonder is won through looking at the regularity of the seemingly irregular body: a body growing out of another body that still has all the ordinary parts. The difference between them is not that one grows out of the other, but rather that only the parasitic twin happens to have facial hair.

A second moment of wonder – or a version thereof, admiration – is invoked when relating the brothers' eating habits ("the lesser" denoting Lazarus):

Yet nothing doth the lesser eate,
He's onely nourish'd with the meate
 wherewith the other feeds,
By which it seemes though outward parts
They haue for two, yet not two hearts,
 this admiration breeds.
 (verse 9, lines 1-6, p 12)

Here admiration is connected to the physical organization of Lazarus's and John's bodies and how they operate together: they seem to share nutrition, and each has a complete set of body parts, apart from the heart. As in the previous verse, wonder is invoked by putting the regularity and the irregularity of the two bodies side by side – both the fact that Lazarus's body has "every part that can be named" and that the two brothers share a heart are to be wondered at. In these verses, the reaction of wonder takes on a decidedly positive hue; Lazarus and John are not met with interpretations of God's wrath or accusations of being prodigious warnings, but are rather seen as delightful entertainment. That John and Lazarus are conjoined is thus cause for astonishment and appreciation, and not primarily fear or disgust. Moreover, while their bodies are described and explained, this does not in itself seem to lessen the expected wonder; quite on the contrary. The very explanation of how they work is expected to elicit admiration.

Similarly to how proto-materialist and divine explanations for monsters could coexist in texts by authors such as Montaigne and Paré, the two categories of wonder defined above sometimes operated at the same time. One could argue that, for example, the early modern English ballads and stories that posit God's wrath or warning as the explanation for the creation of a monster approach the Augustinian model. Ballad verses asserting these explanations sought to provide the audience with reasons for monsters that fit with the then-reigning worldview, which included the idea that God communicates with people through prodigies such as monsters. As we

saw above, monstrous bodies were the embodied carriers of information, waiting to be interpreted. Yet interpreting the divine messages inherent in monstrous bodies did not seem to diminish the wonder, as Aristotle's theory would have it. The stanzas expressing divine warning often appear in the beginning or at the end of the ballad, framing the main part that frequently goes into details of the monstrous body in question, enumerating limbs and accounting for unusual features. Here other details of the case in question surface too, such as the political affiliations of the parents (for example, the "Popish" mother who gave birth to a monster in "A Declaration of a Strange and Wonderfull Monster: Born in Kirkham Parish in Lancashire," 1646) or possible dealings with the Devil (admitted to by a mother who gave birth to "three Monstrous things, all speckled, and like unto young Cats," as recorded in "A Monstrous Birth in Yorkshire" from 1657). There is also the issue of nature "disporting herself in her creations," like Paré notes is the case with certain marine monsters (107).

The verses attributing the existence of the monster solely to God's warnings or his wrath thus do not provide a seamless or unequivocal interpretation – or, solution – to the existence of the monster, but rather seem somewhat haphazardly attached in order to provide a little relief for the reader by imposing some temporary order on the disorder prophesied by the monster. Such explanations only gloss over the many incompatible parts of the ballad, such as the parents' irregular political beliefs, a disorderly or playful Nature, consorting with the Devil, or indeed, the frequent lack of indication, apart from the first or last general warning stanza, of why the particular

couple in the ballad should give birth to a monster in the first place. Consequently, references to a staple cause like God's wrath or the Devil's evildoing do not necessarily end up containing or explaining the monster, or make it less wonder-full.

Thus, as Platt observes, the early modern approach to wonder and marvel challenges an Aristotelian narrative of containment, casting wonders and marvels as remonstrances to epistemological certainties, and not just affirmations of them (16). Wonder was tied to a number of different events and phenomena, and it was a widely experienced reaction present in many different disciplines of writing, such as religious treatises, natural philosophy, travel writing, and popular ballads. In these writings, it was not simply a question of associating wonder with ignorance, doubt, and the impulse to seek the cause behind things one did not understand, letting wonder "lead to its own replacement by *scientia* or *philosophia*" (ibid. 40). Rather, the experience of wonder was valuable in itself, and not just to be bypassed on the speedy road to taming the marvel by explaining it.

From the delineation of these two different types of wonder, two types of wondrous attitudes, or reaction patterns, can be drawn. One attitude involves attempting to explain and categorize the monster, thus divesting the monstrous body of its capacity to stun and amaze. The other adopts a less clear-cut process in its encounter with wondrous things, one where seemingly conflicting emotions operate simultaneously, such as curiosity, fear, and astonishment. Both attitudes can be found in early modern monster accounts, but the latter dominates the early modern context while the former comes to play a more decisive role two hundred years later.

The experiential aspect of wonder is key to how the monster was defined. Daston and Park argue that in the case of early modern natural philosophy, the subjective sensibility of wonder and the objective order of nature, of which monsters were part, were two sides of the same coin (*Wonders* 14). By studying one, natural philosophers necessarily learned about the other. It follows that the way reactions to monsters were described and lived are crucial when we seek to categorize the monster itself. Such reactions are bound to time period and based on the context within each period. For example, while an early modern audience frequently interpreted a monstrous birth as a sign of divine wrath, a nineteenth-century audience would have an entirely different set of meanings to apply to the monster, mainly medical. As for context, an early modern monster resulting from a monstrous birth could be frightening as a messenger of divine wrath, but the same monster could be a delightful object when displayed in a cabinet of curiosity (*ibid.* 15). Similarly, the body of a Victorian-era freak would evoke different reactions on the sideshow stage than it would on a slab in a medical lab.

First-hand accounts of reactions are not always available to us, but sometimes reactions can be read between the lines. For example, in a very rare mention of a monster's psychological condition, Paré tells the tale of a monster who lived for twenty-five years, "which is not natural for monsters, who ordinarily live scarcely any length of time at all because they grow displeased and melancholy at seeing themselves so repugnant to everyone, so that their life is brief" (8). Here Paré deduces that monsters generally die within a short time because they are miserable about their

own monstrosity. Yet given the absence of subjective perspectives from monsters in texts of the time, at least according to my research, it is impossible to know whether this was in fact how the monster felt, or if it was a projection of Paré's own discomfort.

This brief excursion into the embodied perspective of the monster will be extensively elaborated in my analysis of the embodiment of freaks in Chapter 2. For now, we should note the absence of such perspectives in early modern monster texts. Nevertheless, an affective dimension is present in most of the encounters with the monstrous through the wonder, fear, awe, and disgust they inspired – often combined. Even if the framework for understanding monsters changes over the subsequent couple of centuries, the personal, experiential, affective dimension continues to be part of the encounter with someone who is at once radically different and somewhat similar to oneself.

TRUTHS OF THE MONSTROUS BODY

From the examples of wonder in the previous section, we see that the explanations of monsters exceeded the frame of monster-as-portent and carrier of messages from God. The coexistence of several sometimes seemingly disparate explanations of monsters is no more obvious than in Paré's *On Monsters and Marvels*. Recalling Paré's classification of monsters as being "outside the course of Nature," let us now turn to his different explanatory frameworks. These frameworks include

Augustinian and Aristotelian influences, but also proto-scientific and socio-cultural explanations. Together, they point us to the fact that explanations we today would separate into "scientific" and "cultural," respectively, stood side by side in defining a body as monstrous: both counted as valid and true. The limits the monster transgressed thus ranged from the natural and the divine to the social, corporeal, and sexual.

It is evident in Paré's thirteen-point list of what causes monsters that faith in divine and natural agency existed alongside a nascent curiosity about scientific explanations of wonder. Points one and two cite God's glory and wrath as causes for monsters; points three, four, six, eight, ten, and eleven deal with the balance and quality of seed and the physical circumstances of the pregnant body; point five blames the imagination; point seven blames the gestating mother's comportment; hereditary or accidental illnesses are mentioned as causes in point nine; point twelve concerns lying beggars *posing* as monsters; and lastly, point thirteen cites the Devil and demons in the creation of monstrosities. Like in many of the ballads and accounts of monster circulating in England and France at the time, then, divine and satanic influences introduce and finish the list.

All of these causes put the monster somehow outside the course of nature, a description that has both Aristotelian and moral undertones. If we follow Aristotle's materialist theory of generation, "outside the course of nature" would signify a deviation from nature's common course, something unusual compared to what was most commonly taken to be nature's aim. Yet, as we see, there are moral aspects to

Paré's list too, especially in his point about the dissembling beggars. We may attribute this combination of the descriptive and the normative to the view of nature at the time. As Daston and Park remark, "[O]ne the one hand, the natural described what happened always or mostly – nature's custom. On the other hand, nature prescribed what *should* happen, because a teleological principle required that outcome, either because such ends were built into nature or because nature executed God's will" ("Hermaphrodite and Orders" 427). Thus, nature during the early modern period had a wide range of action and, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, license to play.

For each category of causes behind the creation of monsters, Paré works out the respective processes in play. Even when determining a single cause as the reason for a monster, the process of creating a monster is not limited to the activity of a sole agent. For example, a monster could be born by a woman but created by God, as when Paré states that:

[I]t is certain that most often these monstrous and marvelous creatures proceed from the judgment of God, who permits fathers and mothers to produce such abominations from the disorder that they make in copulation, like brutish beasts, in which their appetite guides them, without respecting the time, or other laws ordained by God and Nature. (5)

This particular couple has disregarded the "laws ordained by God and Nature," which in this case amounts to copulating during menstruation. It is then God who devises the punishment (begetting a monster) and nature that permits the actual carrying out of punishment in the form of a monstrous birth. Here we see an intermingling of powers that all had agency in the process of the creation of a monster, without one

dominating the others. This complicates any idea we might have of a single-cause, deterministic model of monster creation. Even when consulting Paré's list of thirteen causes of monsters, the actual process of creating one habitually involved more than one agent. Moreover, the agents involved could be divine, human, natural, or any mix of these. In this process we see mirrored the common early modern orders of being; God, human, and nature, but also the borders between them: a human body was vulnerable to forces ranging from its own imagination to demonic and divine influences and nature's meddling in the balance of seed during pregnancy.

Being guided by customs instead of "ironclad laws," the latter making its entry only towards the end of the seventeenth century, nature "encompassed much of the psyche as well as the body, and bristled with moral directives" (Daston and Park, "Hermaphrodite and Orders" 431). That nature could intervene in both psychological, physical, and social matters comes to light in two particular examples of monstrosities that Paré and many of his fellow authors dwelled on at length, namely monstrous births resulting from the maternal imagination, and hermaphrodites. Even though individual monsters of these types could be interpreted as portents, the processes of their creation were proto-scientifically explained. Additionally, we see the intersection of the proto-scientific with social and moral concerns, all encompassed by nature in the early modern worldview. This intersection provides a particularly good locus for studying the various borders between the human and other orders of being, as well as how the categories of human and monstrous are wrought in conjunction with and response to legal, corporeal, and social domains.

In a society where signs and portents played an important structural role in interpreting communication between different orders of being, the monstrous birth was the paradigmatic prodigious event. It roused public interest, both from neighbors and other, far-away witnesses, thereby exceeding its initially private, familial context. Proposed reasons given for monstrous births ranged from private transgressions (such as bestiality) to political warnings (for example, the monster of Ravenna). In the actual process of gestating a monster, however, there was no divine intervention, and it therefore hints at the early scientific explanation of bodily processes leading to monstrous births.

Paré, a barber-surgeon, displays his curiosity about bodily processes in his section on such monsters. He may report stories of monsters born because of the wrath of God, but he also berates people who are “completely ignorant of anatomy” for speculating on the causes of multiple births without sufficient knowledge of the human body (25-26). In the case of births, multiple and monstrous alike, knowledge concerned a particular body, namely that of the woman. As we will see, the connection between the female body and the production of monsters was complex and long-lasting, and held implications for how the female body was viewed for centuries.

Laqueur argues that during the sixteenth century, the female body was still seen as a version of the *one human* body: the male (Laqueur 10). Hence, the female genitalia were essentially perceived as identical to the male ones, only turned inward. In their critique of Laqueur, Park and Nye dispute that this model of sex difference

was the only one in existence during the early modern period (Park and Nye 54). Without making the "one-sex model" absolute, then, we may still observe in writings by Paré and Montaigne that the female body could in certain cases be considered unstable by its inward-turned genitalia, since it could turn into a male body should the genitalia suddenly emerge. The boundary between inside and outside, and, consequently, between male and female, was therefore constantly potentially in peril. Yet it was not only its wandering genitalia that made the female body unstable, but its imaginative faculties also. The imagination could interfere with gestation in a variety of manners and bring about monstrosities of less or more severe kinds.

The belief that the maternal imagination could influence the shape of the child went back to Antiquity. Paré cites Aristotle, Hippocrates, and Empedocles on the subject, repeating some of their examples. Aristotle's theory of generation was again at the center of the understanding of how the maternal imagination could produce monsters. Recalling the passage from his *On the Generation of Animals*, we see that any child that does not look like its parents is in essence monstrous: "For even he who does not resemble his parents is already in a certain sense a monstrosity; for in these cases Nature has in a way departed from the type" (100). The first deviation from the type, or ideal outcome, was for the child to be female rather than male, a less perfect form but nevertheless a natural necessity. In the last deviation, Aristotle goes from familial resemblance to human resemblance: "Some, though resembling none of their relations, yet do at any rate resemble a human being, but others are not even like a human being but a monstrosity" (ibid.). By linking the two types of deviations – the

female and the monster – Marie-Hélène Huet argues that the monster and the woman "find themselves on the same side, the side of *dissimilarity*" (3; emphasis in original). Both are seen as deviations from the desired outcome.

The theory of the maternal imagination, first attributed to Empedocles, added another aspect to the woman as monstrous: the woman as the producer of monsters. At the root of the fear of the maternal imagination lay the fear of the woman usurping the man's power to determine the shape of the fetus. If the woman did have this power, it meant that monstrous births involved the mother much more than the Aristotelian theory of generation would give her credit for: "Just as monstrosities challenged the general laws of procreation, imagination challenged the respective roles of males and females in generation" (Huet 14). This would accord the woman a power normally occupied by a man, hence making her a dangerous agent, and not just a passive receptacle, in the reproductive process.

It was in the space between expected and actual outcome that the mother's imagination was seen as wreaking havoc. According to Huet, "it was long believed that monsters, inasmuch as they did not resemble their parents, could well be the result of a mother's fevered and passionate consideration of images" (5). Paré describes the maternal imagination as "the ardent and obstinate imagination [impression] that the mother might receive at the moment she conceived – through some object, or fantastic dream – of certain nocturnal visions that the man or woman have at the hour of conception" (38). Pietro Pomponazzi is even more specific when he writes, "when a woman imagines something during the sexual act, she indeed

imprints its image on the fetus. If, during pregnancy, she desires a pomegranate, she marks her child with a pomegranate or something that resembles it" (qtd. in Huet 17-18). Paré cites the ancient example of a woman who gave birth to a child covered in fur after having looked "too intensely at the image of Saint John [the Baptist] dressed in skins, along with his [own] body hair and beard," as well as the woman who clutched a frog while conceiving, thereby giving birth to a boy with the head of a frog (38, 42). The power of such images on the fetus relies on reigning beliefs regarding the time required for a child to be formed in the womb, which Paré, citing Hippocrates, stipulates to being "thirty to thirty-five [weeks] for males and forty or forty-two [weeks]...for females" (40). Before this time, the fetus was seen as vulnerable to imaginative transformations.

The imagination was therefore accorded a rather astonishing amount of power in shaping a corporeal form, the fetus. The bodily process involved in such monstrous births went from looking (in the case of the furry child) or touching (in the case of the frog boy) to impressing the resulting imaginings onto the unfinished human form in utero. A monstrous birth resulting from the maternal imagination transgressed the barrier between abstract imagining and concrete formation. Even though theories of the maternal imagination continued into the eighteenth century, eventually the boundary between the imagination and physical processes became more and more firmly established, ruling out any considerable interaction between them. The early modern period, then, is a time when the human body and its processes were still perceived as permeable enough to be vulnerable to external interference.

Despite the link between women and the production of monsters, there is little evidence in the sources that the blame for the birth of a monster was automatically or explicitly put on women only.³⁰ The multitude of agents involved in the creation of a monster, which we examined above, seems to hold true. In Paré's rather short section on monsters resulting from the imagination, he assigns no blame to the woman who clenched the frog while conceiving and thus gave birth to a frog-headed boy. He does include a sentence of warning, however: "As a result [of the properties of the imagination], it is necessary that women – at the hour of conception and when the child is not yet formed...not be forced to look at or to imagine monstrous things" (39-40).³¹ It is interesting to note the word "forced," as that indicates that looking at something monstrous was not something women did willfully, but rather something they were made to do. One should perhaps not over-interpret this detail, but at least it indicates that we find no automatically judgmental attitude towards women as potential producers of monsters in Paré's account.

Similarly, but stretching the fear of the imagination into the fear of political strife, the woman in the broadside *A Declaration of a Strange and Wonderfull Monster: Born in Kirkham Parish in Lancashire* (1646) could make a monster by supporting a then "monstrous" political position. She is described initially as being of

³⁰ One exception to this is John Sadler's take on the maternal imagination in *The Sicke Womans Private Looking-Glasse* (1636). Sadler claims that the maternal imagination has a very particular function, namely to disguise adultery, when he says that the imagination "stamps" the child "so that the children of an adulteresse may be like unto her owne husband though begotten by another man; which is caused through the force of the imagination which the woman hath of her owne husband in the act of coition" (qtd. in Paré 175).

³¹ Paré intercepted the potential point of criticism that his book could itself be accused of providing pictures that might influence the maternal imagination adversely by telling his imaginary critic that "I do not write for women at all" (55).

good character: "for the woman that bore it, she is a good handsome, proportionable, comely Gentlewoman, young, and of a good complexion, of a merry disposition, and an healthfull Nature, well personed, had her conditions been suitable" (4). This particular woman's positive characteristics were perverted by her adherence to "popish" beliefs, however, which is why she gave birth to a monster, alleges the broadside author. In this instance, then, political beliefs marred the woman's otherwise healthy and attractive countenance, imprinting themselves on the fetus. The imagination is not explicitly mentioned, but it seems to be the model for this particular monster creation too.

The unstable female body in early modern monster accounts resonates in the medicalization of women's bodies in the nineteenth century, where we find anew the woman categorized as essentially "different," albeit this time based on mental and physical categories that were alien to an early modern mindset. The need to keep women away from certain images, due in the early modern literature to her susceptible imagination, could be linked to keeping women away from entire bodies of literature, and from certain spheres of modern life, on account of their susceptibility to harmful images and impulses. Unstable female bodies in the nineteenth century were not only bound in corsets and barred from participating in a number of professional areas, they were often proclaimed hysterical and counted as unable to think intelligently on account of their transgressive and unstable bodies and minds.

We will get back to woman's difference – a product of man's eternal sameness, indeed his *humanness* – in greater depth in Chapter 2. There, we will see that woman's association with the monstrous brings her too close to the boundary of the non-human, effectively excluding her from the unmarked, general, universal category of "humanness." For now, I want to note the complex amalgam of proto-scientific and moral aspects involved in examples of early modern monstrosity that link the monster to the gendered body.

Hermaphrodites constitute a paradigmatic example of the link between the monster and the gendered human body, framed by both proto-scientific and social concerns, is in the case of hermaphrodites. However, whereas monstrous births crystallized the female body as particularly connected to the creation of monsters, hermaphrodites offer an understanding of how the male and female body combined threatened boundaries between human and monster by being put in a frame of excessive, non-normative sexuality. The body that was both male and female – *too much* human, almost – embodied the potential of mythical unity in a certain body of literature, but in actuality presented a threat to the established social order built on heterosexual marriage relations. The category of hermaphrodites is important on account of this perceived excess of the monstrous body in a social setting, but also for its role in introducing the possibility of dissection of the monstrous body to know it. As an example of a monster that looked human and only revealed its monstrosity through close examination, internal as well as external, the hermaphrodite presents us with an instance where the boundaries between human and monster were negotiated

within a medical and legal perspective, rather than understood religiously. The example of hermaphrodites is particularly interesting because hermaphrodites were routinely and consistently confirmed as monsters by doctors. As such, hermaphrodites introduce a turn to the presence of medicine and medical professionals in matters of monsters, a turn that will complete this chapter.

Hermaphrodites had been of general interest in Europe since Antiquity, but attained a particularly acute status in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Daston and Park, "Hermaphrodites and Orders" 419). The story of Hermaphroditus in the *Metamorphoses* by Ovid was the origin story for subsequent accounts of hermaphroditicity. According to Carla Freccero,

[I]t is perhaps because of this text [Ovid's *Metamorphoses*] that today we make a slight distinction between the terms *androgynae* and *hermaphrodite*, the former being a spiritualized union of male and female aspects, the latter connoting a monstrous hybrid, characterized not only by a merging of the two sexes, but by the deformation of each required to affect the union. (149; emphasis in original)

The androgynae, Ruth Gilbert argues, was a figure often taken up in myth and literature, while the hermaphrodite – the concrete, corporeal counterpart to the ideal unity of the androgynae – took the brunt of embodying the real-life version of the double-gendered creature (12).³²

In early modern Europe, the hermaphrodite appears in a range of textual genres: in wonder books as an example of a type of monster; in legal proceedings as a

³² I concentrate on the hermaphrodite rather than the androgynae on account of its real-life embodiment in a range of early modern sources, and because it was the hermaphrodite, not the androgynae, who was regularly deemed monstrous.

transgressor of gender and sexual boundaries; and in medical treatises as specimen to be figured out.³³ Across these genres of writing, the monstrous hermaphrodite embodied a figure that "incorporated the enactment as well as the embodiment of sexual ambiguity" (Gilbert 11). For hermaphrodites, this meant becoming intelligible through the discussion of reproduction at the expense of other markers. The different genres that were occupied with hermaphrodites may have cast hermaphrodites in different roles (as monsters in wonder books; as criminals in court records; and as specimen in medical treatises) and may have served different purposes, but what they had in common was that hermaphrodites were largely defined through their reproductive capabilities. For example, Paré (who conflates hermaphrodites with androgynes) lists them in four categories, according to which sexual organs they possess and whether these organs can take part in reproduction (26-30). Whether they can reproduce or not becomes the defining feature of their monstrosity, since if the physical lines are blurred – if both sets of genitalia are equally functional, or if none of them is – danger seems to set in. The hermaphrodite has to choose which set to use, and therefore which sex to adhere to, as "they are forbidden on pain of death to use any but those they will have chosen, on account of the misfortunes that could result from such" (ibid. 27).

Even as most of Paré's section on hermaphrodites deals not with concrete examples of hermaphrodites but with their general characteristics of them as a group,

³³ For hermaphrodites in wonder books, see Boistuaau (1560) and Paré (1573); legal proceedings, see Daston and Park (1995); medical treatises, see Duval (1612) and Riolan (1614).

this draconian punishment for "using" the sex not chosen was a reality for the hermaphrodites who happened to be discovered and brought before the courts in early modern Europe. Once a hermaphrodite's sex had been determined, s/he "could under no circumstances afterward assume (or resume) the three canonical social signs of the opposite sex: Christian name, dress, and hairstyle" (Daston and Park, "Hermaphrodites in Renaissance France" 7). Paré's somewhat convoluted allusion to "misfortunes" resulting from the blurring of sex – or, in today's terminology, the blurring of gender, since all the three canonical signs address the external signs of sex³⁴ – proves to be rooted in the condemnation of non-normative sexuality: "For some of them have abused their situation, with the result that, through mutual and reciprocal use, they take their pleasure first with one set of sex organs and then with the other: first with those of a man, then with those of a woman" (27). Altogether, one gets the sense from Paré's painstakingly spelling out of all the possible sexual unions potentially available to a hermaphrodite that a "double" nature running free would result in simply too much pleasure.

This attitude is indicative of what Daston and Park call a fairly common display of the "intense fear of homosexual acts" that pervades the literature on hermaphrodites at the time ("Hermaphrodites in Renaissance France" 7). Not keeping to one sex brought with it the constant potential not only of too much pleasure but of "sliding" between sexes, in a different and much more threatening way than we see in the cases where women turn into men when their genitals emerge since sexuality and

³⁴ See footnote 15 above for the difficulty in using modern categories of sex and gender when reading an early modern text.

gender identity were at the core of this particular slide. Genital organization was seen as indicative of sexual practice, and sexual ambiguity was not well tolerated in societies where, as in the case of France, the most important distinction of personhood was that of gender (ibid. 6). Thus, fears of transvestism were mingled with fears of sodomy, homosexuality, and lesbianism, all invested in the body of the hermaphrodite, which leads Gilbert to conclude that "[M]onstrous hermaphroditism signaled more than that which was manifest in the body" (25). The hermaphroditic body was mined for stories and meanings that did not only concern physicality, but also concerned moral injunctions and social norms.

The label of hermaphrodite thus became an open category signifying a range of things that far outstripped the body's actual physical condition. For example, in the 1611 play *The Roaring Girl* by Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, the main character, Moll Cutpurse, is an untraditional woman who crosses boundaries by wearing men's clothes, fighting with a sword, refusing to marry, and speaking the truth in a text otherwise populated by scheming, two-faced characters of both sexes and genders. For that reason, she is described as a "monster," a "hermaphrodite," and a "whore," all descriptions commonly employed for individuals (overwhelmingly female) who transgressed social, sexual, and moral boundaries in the early modern period. In the case of early modern England, there was a veritable war over sumptuary laws. Women who dressed in men's clothes were met by furious invective, such as this from William Averell in 1588: "while they are in condition women, and would seeme in apparell men, they are neither men nor women, but plaine Monsters"

(qtd. in Shepherd 67). The anonymous pamphlet *Hic Mulier, or the Man-Woman* from 1620 continued in a similar vein, this time addressing the culprits directly: "Tis of you, I intreat, and of your monstrous deformitie;...not halfe man, halfe woman, halfe fish, halfe flesh; halfe beast, halfe Monster: but all Odyous, all Divell" (3). The borders that women in men's clothing were seen to transgress were multiple: between man and woman, between human and animal, between human and monster, and, ultimately, both repulsive and devilish.

Taken together, these examples show that "the term 'hermaphroditism' was used metaphorically to label appearances or behaviors that challenged the heterosexual binary of gender" (Gilbert 25). This was where the socio-cultural aspect of the hermaphrodite's monstrosity lay. Hermaphrodites did not fall under the category of portents, but were seen as monsters because of their unusual genital organization. Instead of being interpreted as religious omens, then, they signified as monsters in a medical capacity to a larger extent than the other types of monstrosity examined here. It followed that doctors, not clergymen or aristocrats, were the appropriate interpreters of hermaphrodites.

Whereas doctors had been the authority in deciding the legal and sexual identities of hermaphrodites since the mid-eleventh century, the medical interest in hermaphrodites changed towards the end of the early modern period (Daston and Park, "Hermaphrodites in Renaissance France" 6). In Paré's wonder book, the bodily features of hermaphrodites are still described from an external viewpoint when he mentions looking at the dimensions of the genitals and the abundance or lack of pubic

hair (and the quality of it: coarse or fine?), listening to the tenor of the voice, and noting manners of behaving (bold? Timid? Fearful? Robust?). The inside of the body is not mentioned as a place to find the truth of the hermaphrodite; that truth lay in external countenance and characteristics.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, however, authors writing about hermaphrodites began calling not only for external examinations of hermaphroditic bodies, but for internal examinations and dissections. When it came to matters of deciding sex, doctors "began to emphasize the hidden and internal over the external and apparent" (Daston and Park, "Hermaphrodites in Renaissance France" 6). This change from external to internal evidence of the true sex came to save one hermaphrodite from being put to death. The case concerned Marie le Marcis, a French hermaphrodite who was accused of sodomy in 1601 after she had donned men's clothes, taken a male name, and announced her intent to marry a woman. On occasion of the court case, Jacques Duval, a doctor who served on the Rouen commission, an expert panel to determine Marie's sex, claimed that Marie had an internal penis that emerged when s/he became aroused (Daston and Park, "Hermaphrodite and Orders" 426). Jean Riolan, another doctor who served on the Rouen commission, disagreed with Duval about Marie's sex, but not the method by which to find it: after an internal examination, Riolan claimed that Marie had a prolapsed uterus (*ibid.* 429). The rest of the commission chose to focus on Marie's external genitals.

This example shows that two doctors who disagreed about the outcome of a case in which it was paramount to find the truth of a body, nevertheless both

advocated looking *into* the body for answers. According to Daston and Park, this meant that "both had absorbed enough of the teachings and prestige of the new, post-Vesalian anatomy to condemn the other members of the Rouen commission who had been content with a Paré-style external examination" ("Hermaphrodite and Order" 429). We see an interest in looking into the body by dissection in several publications not only on hermaphrodites but also on monsters in general from the latter part of the sixteenth century, and growing into the seventeenth century. Yet such signs coexisted with other and older frameworks of understanding the body, monstrous and human, for a while longer. For example, while Paré advocates only external examinations of hermaphrodites, he also mentions that a double-bodied monster with one head, born in 1569, was "dissected by master René Ciret, master Barber and Surgeon" (15).

The prevalence of overlapping explanations for monsters is significant here, for the story of how the monster became a subject for dissections rather than for ballads is not uncomplicated or inevitable. Daston and Park, whose longitudinal study of monsters originally began as a story where "monsters shifted over the course of the sixteenth century to become natural wonders – sources of delight and pleasure – and then to become objects of scientific inquiry," found that they had to reconsider this neat trajectory (*Wonders* 176). Faced with evidence that definitions of and reactions to monsters overlapped for centuries, they chose to abandon their initial narrative in favor of "three separate complexes of interpretations and associated emotions – horror, pleasure, and repugnance – which overlapped and coexisted during much of the early modern period" (*ibid.*). For each reaction, they provide a particular

explanation for monsters: the reaction of horror was tied to the monster as prodigy and divine messenger; the reaction of pleasure was connected to monsters as sports (or perhaps better, spectacle); and lastly, the reaction of repugnance was elicited when the monster was viewed as an error and a deviation from nature's proper course (ibid. 176-201). Each of these "complexes" can be found in the early modern literature on monsters, and complicate an easy leap from seeing the monster as portent to seeing it as scientific fact.

The overlap between older and newer explanations is not only found in vernacular sources, but also in medical texts such as Riolan's 1605 *De Monstro Nato Lutetiae*, a philosophical-medical treatise on a pair of conjoined twins. The text opens with a general meditation on what causes monstrosities, not unlike what we find in Paré or Boistuaud, before providing "Notes of things which were observed in dissection" ("Notae eorum quae in dissectione observata sunt"), an annotated list of the internal parts of the monster. Each organ is abbreviated with a letter that we find again on the organs depicted in the detailed, life-like illustration of the conjoined twins on the fold-in page in the middle of the treatise (Fig. 1.1).



Fig. 1.1. Riolan's conjoined twins (1605)

The wonder book-like introduction to the nature of monsters stands in marked contrast to the careful, enumerated list of body parts retrieved from the systematic dissection and examination that was carried out on the twins. Riolan's treatise thus has one foot in the early modern model of multiple monster explanations, and the other in the emerging understanding of monsters as anatomical beings, their bodies fit to be dissected for their truths. In other words, we find an overlapping of reactions and explanations in monster accounts for some time, as Daston and Park observe, but we may also discern a narrative that increasingly considers the monster as an object of scientific, anatomical inquiry. When we look at monster accounts three hundred years apart, the overlapping reactions and explanations on which Daston and Park concentrate gradually give way to other discourses on monstrosity, some of them versions of early modern approaches, and some specific to the nineteenth century.

DISSECTION: A NEW TRUTH OF THE BODY

Riolan's illustration is of a type of monster that was frequently depicted in broadsides and wonder books, the conjoined twin, yet the style of this particular illustration is more reminiscent of the engravings we find accompanying Vesalius's *De Fabrica Humanis Corporis* than of the woodcuts illustrating vernacular sources. As noted, early modern wonder books and medical treatises often shared material, be it examples or illustrations. In the case of Riolan's treatise we still see this overlap, but we also see an approach to the body that indicates the growing presence of Vesalian dissection and anatomy. We find a similar overlap in vernacular sources. In popular ballads from the middle of the seventeenth century, a budding scientific consciousness coexists with other frames of thinking. In *The Pack of Autolyclus*, we find the ballad "Nature's Wonder" from 1664. As a text that encompasses explanations both dominant in the earlier part of the period and indicating the new anatomical focus on monsters, it merits some attention. The ballad recounts the story of a monster born to "the Wife of John Waterman, a Husbandman, in the Parish of Fisherton-Anger, near New Sarum, or Salisbury" (140). The monster was composed of two children joined at the navel, with separate upper bodies but only two legs:

A stranger Wonder Nature did
 ne're frame of Humane Seed;
A Monster of mishapen Forme
 I here to you present,
By this Example you may learn
 to feare Gods Punishment.
 (verse 1, lines 1-6: 141-142)

Here we get the reason for the monster in the last line: God's punishment, pure and simple. We are never told *why* God chose to mete out his punishment to this couple in particular, but as recorded earlier, that is not wholly unusual in ballads concerning monstrous births. Yet it is not God who is the direct agent who creates the monster; it is nature. Nature constructs the monster, a "strange wonder" in a "mishapen Forme." In this we recognize the Aristotelian idea of monsters as deviating from the typical, common form. That means that nature was endowed with a certain measure of power to execute variations on God's perfect creations. This becomes clear in verse 6: "Four Armes were on the body plac'd,/it had of Leggs but two;/Thus Nature had her work defac'd,/which she doth seldom do" (verse 6, lines 5-8). A monster is uncommon insofar as nature rarely defaces its own work. Here it is still nature that is the driving force, not God. This story begins and ends with the customary exhortation to the readers to beware God's wrath, but there is no mention of how the monster functioned as a specific portent, and nature is the dominant force behind creation and deviation throughout the ballad. In the last verse, however, we catch a glimpse of another authority, namely the "chyrurgeons":

Two dayes and nights this Monster liv'd
in woefull misery,
The Parents they were sadly griev'd,
the Neighbours came to see;
At length it dy'd, and was convey'd
for Chyrurgeons to Dissect,
And what Report thereof had said,
they found it in Effect"
(verse 8, lines 1-6: 143).

In this story, then, the surgeons are the authorities to whom the monster is given, and who confirm the body as monstrous after having dissected it. This example is similar to that of hermaphrodites, whose bodies were interpreted and determined by doctors, but whereas medical examination tended to be the norm for hermaphrodites, the presence of surgeons is found more infrequently in reports of the larger category of monstrous births. In Paré's accounts of monstrous births, for example, authority figures include the Prince of Piedmont, to whom a monster was sent in 1578, King Charles, who received a monster in 1569, and the pope, as in the case of a monster born in 1493. Such authority figures of the cloth or the aristocracy are common last stations for monsters in accounts such as Paré's. There are also times when Paré notes that he has taken monsters home for his own "collection." In all of these instances, it is likely that the monstrous bodies were incorporated into private collections and *Wunderkammern*. As such, the monsters received a particular kind of validation as wondrous and portentous things to be exhibited along other types of wonders.

The matter-of-fact mention in a popular ballad of the monster being dissected tells us something about the organization of knowledge about monsters, and the transformations in authorities validating them, at the time. The status of the monstrous body changes in the hand-over of authority from private collectors – royal or religious – to surgeons and dissectors. First of all, the fact that the monster goes from being an exhibit in a *Wunderkammer* to being cut up on a surgeon's table signals that the message of the monstrous body had changed. It is no longer a portent of divine messages and warnings to be wondered at, feared, and enjoyed; rather, the

monstrous body is mined for anatomical knowledge about the body. In "Nature's Wonder," instead of being sent to the local authority, the monster is handed over to the doctors and dissected to find the knowledge "hidden" in its body. Thus we see that the surgeons "found in effect" what had been reported of its monstrosity; that is, they found the truth of the monster in its body.

The still strong presence of nature and the inclusion of God's wrath in this ballad and in other texts on monsters throughout the early modern period – in short, the overlapping of different explanations, as Daston and Park remind us – makes it impossible to call this a univocal or heterogeneous turn. Moreover, the continued popular interest in the monstrous body for centuries afterwards means that monsters did not exit the public domain when they became subjects of dissection and anatomical interest. Yet if we look at the increasing popularity of dissection as a subject taught in universities and, gradually, as part of a public consciousness, a change in how bodies – monstrous and human – were treated, is nevertheless visible. What is more, this acute interest in the very materiality of the body (which after Vesalius was expressed by cutting into it), means that the human body eclipsed the monstrous one as the object of wonder: the wonder earlier embodied by monsters transferred to the human body in all its glorious functions, which were discovered and unearthed by the dissector.

That did not mean that monsters were not still of interest to the natural philosophers and new scientists, but the mode of reporting and intention behind the reports change. In Turner's *A compleat history* (1697), for example, wonder has by no

means stopped being of interest, but there is the gradual emergence of discourses that seem more recognizable to our current idea of what constitutes scientific investigation. Wonders were reconfigured around the time when the "interweaving of admiration, wonder, and curiosity into a sensibility of inquiry" gained foothold among people connected to the Royal Society in London, like Isaac Newton (Daston and Park, *Wonders* 304). For these new natural philosophers, monsters were still part of their worldview and their investigations, but the earlier view of monsters as portents was largely supplanted by an approach marked by systematic, personal investigation, which included taking things apart to their smallest pieces in order to learn their truth, their nature.

Despite the experiential and experimental nature of these investigations, a discourse that resembles what we today identify as scientific had yet to arise. There was still much overlap between older and newer explanations of monstrous bodies, an overlap that is well illustrated by the example of the birth of a monstrous calf in the latter half of the 1660s. The "Account of a very odd Monstrous Calf" appeared in Turner's *A compleat history*. This calf was discovered inside its mother's womb when she was killed by a butcher: "its hind Legs had no joints, and its feet were divided like the Claws of a Dog, his Tongue was tripple, and after the manner that *Cerberus's* is described...Between the fore and hind Feet, there was a great Stone upon which it was laid: This Stone weighed 20 pound and a half" (290). We still see a trace of monstrosity in this account through its reference to Cerberus, the canine guardian of the underworld in Ancient Greek mythology, and in the mention of hybridity between

calf and dog. The main point of interest is still the heavy stone found between the monster's legs. According to the author, "Dr. Haughton of Salisbury keeps this Stone, of which he hath sent a part to Mr. Boyle, who communicated it, together with a Letter, to the Royal Society" (ibid.).

Turner does not indicate a year for this event, but when consulting the very first volume of the *Philosophical Transactions* (1665) by the newly formed Royal Society, we find that the "Account of a very odd Monstrous Calf" turns up again.³⁵ The wording of the account in the two texts is almost identical but neither text provides an illustration of the monster. Most early modern texts on monsters, vernacular as well as philosophical and medical, were illustrated. Illustrations served a twofold importance: "they provided concrete evidence for tales of [monsters], and they possessed a tangibility that was more striking than words" (Huet 16). Designed in frightening detail to titillate and shock viewers, the illustrations were arguably integral to the pleasure that monster accounts provided. To omit the illustration signals that these texts were intended to do something else than provide quick, easy, visual entertainment.

Moreover, in keeping with the Royal Society's aim of acquiring knowledge through observation and experiments, Robert Boyle – the Boyle of Turner's story – goes to Hampshire to interview one of the witnesses to this monstrous birth. Thus, in the second volume of the Society's *Philosophical Transactions*, also from 1665, we

³⁵ The Royal Society was set up in London in 1660 with a Royal Charter from King Charles II. Founders included Christopher Wren and Robert Boyle, and their aim was to establish "a Colledge for the Promoting of Physico-Mathematicall Experimentall Learning" (charter quoted in the Royal Society "History").

get "An Observation imparted to the Noble Mr. Boyle, by Mr. David Thomas, touching some particulars further considerable in the Monster mentioned in the first Papers of these Philosophical Transactions." The observation goes as follows:

Upon the strictest inquiry, I find by one, that saw the Monstrous Calf and stone, within four hours after it was cut out of the Cows belly, that the Breast of the Calf was not stony (as I wrote) but that the skin of the Breast and between the Legs and of the Neck (which parts lay on the smaller end of the stone) was very much thicker, than on any other part, and that the Feet of the Calf were so parted as to be like the Claws of a Dog. The stone I have since seen; it is bigger at one end than the other; of no plain Superficies, but full of little cavities. The stone, when broken, is full of small peble stones of an Ovall figure: its colour is gray like free-stone, but intermixt with veins of yellow and black. (20-21)

This is an investigative follow-up piece on a monstrous birth – an event hardly unusual for publications of the time period – by none other than a nobleman and prominent "new natural philosopher" from London. Boyle's observational account downplays the language of monstrosity, divinity and portentous messages even more than the original report, concentrating instead on close and detailed description of texture, positioning, material, and size of the spectacle. He refutes the earlier assumption that the calf's breast should be made of stone based on his new observation of the "very much thicker" skin, and accounts for the consistency of the strange stone, presumably after it has been cut up. This illustrates the new method advocated by natural philosophers in England: only personal observation and experimentation could act as basis of knowledge, as they are here used to refute earlier assumptions about the monstrous calf. The object at hand is still called "the

Monstrous Calf," but gone are any intimations of the calf serving any other function than to be an object for the scientific eye.

The scientific method developed by the members of the Royal Society took several cues from Andreas Vesalius's revolutionizing approach to the human body a century earlier, first and foremost the importance of hands-on, personal experience of the material. Vesalius, born in 1514, educated as an anatomist and physician and teaching in Padua, Bologna and Pisa, made considerable changes to the centuries-old ritual of cutting open bodies. He was very much against what he called the "detestable procedure" in the Gymnasiums,

wherein some were accustomed to administer the cutting of the human body while others narrated the history of the parts. The latter, indeed from a lofty chair arrogantly cackle like jackdaws about things which they have never tried, but which they commit to memory from the books of others or which they place in written form before their eyes. (Vesalius 57)

This referred to the ritual character of anatomy and dissection as it was taught in the universities up until Vesalius's time: the professor of anatomy, who presided over the dissection, sat above the podium in a pulpit or great chair, where he read aloud from a medical textbook, usually either by Mondino or Galen (Kemp and Wallace 23). The barber-surgeon or surgeon would then perform the actual dissection, illustrating the text read aloud by the professor. This ritual was witnessed by a small crowd of medical students. The aim of the session was to prove what was written in the textbooks rather than focus on what could be discovered in the body.

Vesalius sought to modernize the institutionalized study of anatomy and to shift the focus from a practice that focused on the text to a practice where handiwork and personal experience with bodies dominated.³⁶ In the service of this aim, he wrote his own anatomy book, *De Humanis Corporis Fabrica, Libri Septem* (1543), which became one of the most important ways to learn how to dissect the human body for decades, if not centuries, to come. The most important of Vesalius's interventions into the medical field for the questions in my investigation is what I call the move "from book to body." By this I mean that medical knowledge of the human body ceased to come from accounts in older textbooks, some of which were not even based on human bodies but rather on animal physiology.³⁷ Moreover, the dissected human body was now a distinctly secular body whose parts were there to be enumerated and discovered. As the very title of Vesalius's book tells us, it is about the very *fabric* of the human body – no longer primarily a divine being created by God, but a body of matter for the anatomists to handle. This matter could only be discovered by exploring it personally and with their own hands, "putting a little more trust in their

³⁶ It should be mentioned that dissection as a discrete part of academic medical education was preceded by several practices involving opening bodies, such as fetus extraction, autopsy, and embalming, from which "dissection" could not be isolated for some time (Park 15). To this we may add the practice of opening up monsters to see how their bodies were composed. Such practices did not carry the same stigma as a public academic dissection, which pre-eighteenth-century legislation was mostly performed on executed criminals. These other practices often took place in more domestic settings, and were less a part of a formal university curriculum than ways for a range of practitioners (midwives, doctors, religious orders) to extract knowledge from the opened-up human body (ibid. 17).

³⁷ Vesalius claimed that Galen was "misled by his apes" and that "it now becomes obvious to us from the reborn art of dissection, from diligent reading of the books of Galen, and from impeccable restoration in numerous places of (the text of) these books, that he himself never dissected the body of a man who had recently died" (59). This understatement of Galen's experience with human bodies, Park argues, was mostly for polemical effect and not entirely true.

rational faculties and their eyes" as Vesalius writes, thereby setting sensory experience and tactile practice above textual learning (59).³⁸

Importantly in this regard, Vesalius was highly concerned with having illustrations in *De Humanis Corporis Fabrica*: highly detailed pictures of figures in various stages of dissection that are famous to this day, and which arguably were equally important to the artistic tradition of portraying the human body as to the learning of anatomy (Fig. 1.2).³⁹



Fig. 1.2. "Muscle Man" from Vesalius's *De Humanis Corporis Fabrica* (1543)

³⁸ Vesalius's writing style was highly polemical in its attacks on previous authorities in the field and quick to emphasize "the distasteful and occasionally illicit origins of his cadavers, recounting gory details with gleeful satisfaction," something Park attributes to his eagerness to show his own dedication to the discipline (215, 218).

³⁹ The illustrations in *De Humanis Corporis Fabrica* portray bodies in various stages of dissection, in landscapes or in more non-descript surroundings, mostly with a certain life-like quality to them despite their nascent disintegration. Art and dissection met with particularly rich results in the practice of Leonardo da Vinci. Leonardo began studying anatomy and became so interested in the human frame that he was allowed to perform dissections at hospitals in Florence and Milan before dissection became a mainstay in European medical education (O'Malley et al. 27). Watts remarks that because of lack of anesthesia, empiricist discoveries were not utilized by doctors to begin with: "Knowledge of anatomy remained of more importance to artists – for example, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and Rubens, than to medical doctors" (30).

Thus the scene is set for the secular, human-oriented, material "project" that wanted to chart every minute detail and every particular function of the human body. With this came also interest in the commonalities and differences found between the bodies that were dissected and an impetus to stratify and collect these into knowledge of *the* human body. Displaying a conflation of "man" and "human" that was to continue for centuries, "anatomy was about knowing the generic human body, which was understood as male" (Park 14). This was of course not a unified, homogenous project, but Vesalius's influence on subsequent learning about the human body in Europe was enormous.

It was largely Vesalius's achievement that dissection was seen to hold the promise of truth to be found in the dissected body. This truth was connected to a different kind of status and knowledge than the one demonstrated when a monster was sent to the king to be marveled at, or when Paré took home a monster to "keep it as [an example of] a monstrous thing" in his private collection (Paré 14). The truth sought in the dissected human body was not its divine message or its (un-)natural wondrous quality, but a particularized, detailed knowledge of all its components and functions. This may indicate a search for "objective" knowledge, yet Sawday emphasizes that dissection practices and their context were "far from disinterested" and that

[W]hat the Renaissance anatomist strove to achieve in the dissection theatre was not "clinical detachment" but, instead, a form of cultural location. The body had to be "placed" within a nexus of complementary discourses, so that its full symbolic significance would be appreciated by those gathered to watch its progressive disintegration. (63)

Whereas Sawday emphasizes the criminal investigations preceding dissection in this cultural location of the body, I want to draw attention to how the knowledge produced in dissection was influenced by the lack of clinical detachment. If the dissection situation was not disinterested or detached, the corporeal "truths" mined by the anatomists would also necessarily be subject to the socio-cultural circumstances in which the dissection took place. As we will see in the next chapter, such circumstances influenced the idea of the normal, human body that came out of dissection in the nineteenth century. Three hundred years earlier, we find the beginnings of that idea in the culturally located dissection practices of early modern Europe.

Thus the new knowledge gathered from systematic anatomical investigation was centered on the body of the human, which might have been liberated from theology, but "only to be made subject to the equally stringent demands of scientific method" (Sawday 98). The same stringent demands were being made of monstrous bodies also, the beginnings of which we glimpse in Riolan's *De Monstro*. As the anatomical method of analyzing bodies took hold, the human and the monstrous body were increasingly being held to similar medical standards; they were both dissected for their inherent bodily truth. While they had that in common, the consequences for the human and the monster were not the same: the human body became the privileged body to study while the monstrous body became interesting only insofar as it could say anything about the human. Gradually, then, the multifaceted framework within

which monsters were interpreted in the early modern period became reduced to only a few discourses in which monsters could legitimately be studied and witnessed.

With this narrowing of playing fields for the monster, the multiple frameworks characteristic of early modern monster accounts began to subside. The possibility of seeing the creation of a monster as the work of a multitude of agents was replaced by models of creation built on taxonomies that had a much narrower range of explanations. The different processes that coexisted in Paré's early effort to classify monsters mutated and became stratified as the available explanatory frameworks changed. The boundaries between humans, monsters, God, and nature hardened and categories became more set.

Considering monsters' long trajectory not only as scientific objects but as popular entertainment inspiring wonder or curiosity, I do not want to argue that this apparent attention to the scientific aspect of monsters signals a univocal turn towards their naturalization, a move Daston and Park also warn against (*Wonders* 176). Nevertheless, as medical discourse tightened its grip around monstrosity and its definitions, it is difficult not to observe the increasingly medicalized model of monstrosity.⁴⁰

Thus we see that the heterogeneous way of interpreting the cause of different beings did not last. Beginning with a growing body of specialized writing on monsters that located their causes largely in permutations of natural variation and

⁴⁰ As we will see in Chapter Two, the medicalization of monstrosity permeated the entertainment sphere too, resulting in the bifurcation of monsters into medical science and popular entertainment, each deploying the same language of anatomical deviation and pathology.

action, we see a language of the normalized body emerging. The move to seeing monsters as errors of nature rather than as signs from God or playful variations in nature was a turning point in how different orders of the living were thought in relation to each other. Key to this shift is the stripping of agency from nature. As Daston and Park claim, “the repugnance of monsters was not so much the consequence of making nature autonomous of God as it was of enslaving nature entirely to God’s will. Nature was no longer permitted to play” (*Wonders* 202).

Monsters lost their place as nature's playful errors. Dissections continued, but not so much to inspire wonder as to see what abnormalities could say about the normal (ibid. 204). Monsters thus helped draw a line between what counted as human and what fell outside of that category. In fact, the increasing interest in monstrous bodies as objects of science, in their capacity as deviations from the human, can be taken as the beginning of the endeavor to make the "normal" human body the norm for all living beings. Seth argues that not only was the human the norm, but she or he was the center of meaning, at the expense of other agents: "[I]f the world was to consist of meaning, the source of that meaning was to originate with the human subject. Nature, be it in the physical body or the physical environment, was no longer an agent with volition and intent, but a mute and passive object for study and classification" ("Difference" 85).

DESCARTES AND REASON

William Turner's English wonder book was published at the very end of the seventeenth century. The book contains many examples of monstrosities, some repeated from earlier sources and some contemporary to the author. Turner frequently does not include reasons for the particular monsters when describing them, but sticks to descriptions lacking the wonder and curiosity we find, for example, in Paré's work. What, then, is Turner's motivation for collecting these events and publishing them in a book? In the introduction he writes,

And this I do on purpose to rouze and awaken the Reason of Men asleep, into a Thinking and Philosophical Temper; that if possible, when they will wink and sleep, and scorn to spend a serious Thought upon the Common Scheme of the World, they may startle at Extraordinaries, and wind up their Reasons a little higher, upon the sight of Wonders. (Turner 275)

The remarkable word here is "Reason." The point of Turner's tales of the wonderful is to awaken reason and to get men to think about the "Common Scheme of the world." Wonder is no longer there merely to entertain or to astound in itself, but it has been enlisted in the quest to "wind up" reason, a phrase that seems to indicate that wonder has the capacity to annoy or disturb reason. Turner also mentions two somewhat baffling outcomes of this reading activity: to be happy, and to avoid "nauseousness" (*sic*). Thus, monsters and wonders not only improve one's daily life (surely happiness and the absence of nausea are good things); they also become an aid to humanist man in his quest to sharpen his rational faculties and to fulfill his divine potential.

Upon further examination, reason and sleep attain more significant positions. If we consult Descartes, sleep is a state in which reason is easily tricked: "[F]or we can imagine, when asleep, that we have another body and see other stars and another earth without there being any such" (24). Moreover, when reason sleeps, not only our surroundings morph into false structures; monsters become real.⁴¹ Real monsters represent proof to Descartes that one is not in possession of one's reason. As he writes, "whether we are asleep or awake, we should never allow ourselves to be convinced except on the evidence of our reason. Note that I say of our *reason*, and not of our imagination or of our senses...[for] we can well imagine distinctly the head of a lion mounted on the body of a goat, without concluding that a chimera exists in this world" (25-26; emphasis in original). In Descartes's view of the imagination, fabulous creatures can be conjured, but without any necessary link to the real world. That means that the powers the imagination previously held over corporeal form, which we saw in the example of the maternal imagination, are thoroughly severed. There are no real-world consequences to imagining a monster in Descartes's account, certainly no furry or frog-headed children. Supported by what Daston and Park call "a new understanding of the pathological imagination as a breeding ground for enthusiasm, superstition, and marvels," the only likely outcome of an overactive imagination is madness (*Wonders* 339).

The removal of the monster from the realm of human, immediate, physical experience happens in the moment when the monster is excluded from daily life,

⁴¹ See the first page of Chapter 2 for Francisco Goya's portrayal of monsters surrounding a sleeping figure in his painting *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* (c. 1797).

when the monstrous *body* ceases to matter: rather than being agential, it becomes inert. This exclusion happens gradually, first through the end of wonder in the natural sciences. But the death knell is delivered by Descartes' view of living beings, both human and animal. Not only does he dismiss animals as subjugated to humans by virtue of their lack of the ability to reason or speak, he also relegates monsters to the domains of the imagination, thus expelling the monstrous body from mattering materially. Whereas monsters earlier had been material agents in the world of humans, nature and gods, Descartes declares them fit only for sleep, fantasy, and madness.⁴² He thus severs monsters, represented for him by the Chimaera, from their corporeality, and consigns them to the decidedly immaterial realm of the imaginary. The monster becomes an *idea* instead of a real, breathing, portentous being.

A second result of this move is that Descartes divorces the reaction of wonder from its embodied, *human* agent: wonder is no longer registered "in the heart and the blood; unlike the other passions that have good or evil as their objects and hence involve the heart, wonder has only knowledge as its object and thus occurs strictly in the brain" (Greenblatt 19). Thus we see that not only does the monstrous body get lost to the imagination, but the very bodily reaction to monsters is relegated to the backlog of human experience. What gets lost in Descartes's erection of the human as the only protagonist, other than the weeding out the monster from daily life? One answer is that "Reason" substituted the broad and many-faceted knowledges imparted by and through a multitude of bodies. The encounter between one's own body, reacting with

⁴² Monsters become immaterial, but, as we see in their newfound place in anatomy and dissection, their bodies become mere matter.

wonder, horror or recognition, and the bodies of monsters, being wondrous, significant, and active, moves into less multifarious domains and understandings. From here onwards, the concept of humanness comes to be tied to one particular body, and monsters – now without agency or status as participants in the pantheon of beings – are relegated to the margins in opposition to which humans constitute themselves.

Particularly pertinent to the discussion of the new norm of humanness is the figure of the abnormal individual, which Foucault charted in his lectures at *Collège de France* from 1974-1975 (*Abnormal*). The domain of abnormality, argues Foucault, was made up of three figures: the human monster, the individual to be corrected, and the masturbator. In the present investigation, it is the human monster that forms the connection between early modern monstrosity and modern abnormality:

The ambiguities of the human monster, which are widely diffused at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, are present, toned down and muffled of course, but nonetheless firmly implanted and really effective in the problematic of abnormality and the judicial and medical techniques that revolve around abnormality in the nineteenth century. (57)

In other words, the early modern monster can be found again in the abnormal individual a few hundred years later, albeit in a different form.

The abnormal individual emerges at a time that witnesses the height of Euro-American interest in applying statistics to bodies, resulting in complex webs of biopower generated from the study of populations and culminating in the theory of eugenics. Indeed, "almost all the early statisticians had one thing in common: they

were eugenicists" (Davis 6). The same went for many prominent doctors of the time. The close bonds between statistics, normality, eugenics, and medicine in the nineteenth century set the scene for the next chapter's investigation of concepts of humanness and freakery.

CHAPTER 2:

Female Freaks: Embodiment, Dissection, and Challenging the "Man" in "Human"

The aim of the previous chapter was to offer an alternative, material history of humanism, a broad sketch of how what came to count as human was developed in continual negotiation with what was considered monstrous. An important part of this undertaking was to look at the history of the monstrous body and what role it played in this story. We left off at the moment when Descartes made the human the only rational (and hence the only viable) being in our world. The monster had become an idea, not a body that could be threatening, prodigious, wonderful, or pleasurable. Monsters were banished to the imagination, where, as we see in Goya's painting below, they could no longer wreak havoc in the world at large, but only in the non-rational mind of the individual.



Fig. 2.1. Francisco Goya: *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* (c. 1797)

The eventual result of such a development was that monsters were divested of their portentous power and became only embodied anatomical deviations. Thus, in this chapter we encounter the question of the relationship between the human and the monster in the guise of the opposition between the normal and the abnormal in the nineteenth century. Circumscribed by a range of medical discourses in which the normal and the abnormal were central values when it came to classifying bodies, the previously polysemic monstrous body became funneled into two particular bodies: the sideshow freak and the anatomically abnormal body.⁴³ In the nineteenth-century Anglo-American world, the freak show and medical anatomy were privileged popular discursive realms of human self-understanding and self-fashioning at the time, as well as paradigmatic for the showing and investigation of monsters. By virtue of this, anatomy and the sideshow provide us with a rich scope of information about the experience of human and monstrous embodiments. Conversely, these are interesting fields to examine for their knowledge-constitution: the resonances and dissonances between the two fields show us several ways that the freak and the normal body were

⁴³ A note on vocabulary: the term "freak" is contested both within and outside of the sideshow business. According to Robert Bogdan (1988), it was and still is the preferred word used by the performers in freak shows to describe themselves. A more recent validation of the term comes from Jackie Molen, a performer in an itinerant sideshow, who in 2009 proclaimed that she was "proud to be a freak" (Correll). The protest against the use of the word staged in 1903 by the Protective Order of Prodigies, an organized group of freaks who thought the term *prodigy* was more dignified than freak, belies the consensus Bogdan claims (although this protest is rumored to have been a publicity stunt staged by P.T. Barnum). Starting with the move to considering freaks exploited disabled people around the 1920s, the word is now largely seen as politically incorrect in the broader popular discourse to describe bodies that look abnormal (Nadja Durbach 14-15). In the nineteenth century, however, freak was the name accorded to sideshow performers, many of whom wore the name with pride. *Monster* was not in particular use in popular discourse on abnormal bodies, but *monstrosity* still existed in medical discourse to describe anomalous structures.

constituted, not least through a larger social context of statistics, biopower, and eugenics.

In a Bergsonian move, the body of the early modern monster goes from being banished from the world as simply an idea of the imagination to being reconstituted as a material, embodied image inhabiting the world.⁴⁴ The reconstituted, material body of the monster belongs to the Victorian freak. The freak performer's body inhabits a similar multivalence as the early modern monster did, even though the points of reference have changed. The Victorian sideshow freak shares several characteristics with early modern monsters, chiefly its status as a being that bordered on other kinds of beings (divine, animal, human) and its position as popular entertainment. Yet the two time periods in question – the early modern era and the nineteenth century – harbored different configurations of the relationship between human and monster/freak. While the early modern monster frequently had ties to a divine power by being a portent, the nineteenth-century freak held no such privileged messenger position. The freak might still be seen as bordering on the bestial, but less as the literal result of mixing of human and animal than as a spectacular example of the fragile and contested classificatory borders between humans and other animals that authors such as Darwin had brought into the public sphere. The Victorian freak

⁴⁴ According to Deleuze in his book on Bergson, *Bergsonism* (1991), recollections (or memories, ideas) become actualized into embodied images in the present: "The appeal of the present is such that [recollections] no longer have the ineffectiveness, the impassivity that characterized them as pure recollections; they become recollection-images, capable of being 'recalled.' They are actualized or embodied" (63). In this move, it becomes possible to (re-) attach affectivity to the now material image, to *matter*, which in this chapter is represented by the body of the freak.

was no divine messenger or demonic punishment, nor was it the sign of human error and transgression of moral and social boundaries, such as the early modern monster that resulted from a couple who copulated during menstruation.⁴⁵ Instead, it was the deviation – sometimes unwanted, sometimes curious or fascinating, sometimes merely necessary – from the norm.

Part of the change in the signification of the monstrous body between the 1500s and the 1800s was that the overall influence and visibility of the monster changed markedly. From being present in a wide range of people's daily lives through popular pamphlets and broadsides, quasi-medical treatises, and theological works, as well as through neighborly sightings and witnessing, the monster was gradually scarcer. While the early modern monster was interpreted within a wide range of discourses – theological, popular, proto-scientific, legal – the Victorian freak is placed first and foremost in medical discourse. This extends to the freak's presence in popular entertainment like sideshows, where the status of the deviant body was closely tied up with how its deviance could be described medically. Rosemarie Garland Thomson remarks, "[T]he fabulous was shot through with the scientific; truth claims abutted the credulous; the mundane flanked the peculiar" (7). Hence, even though medical discourse dominated the ways the abnormal body was studied and staged, it does not mean that this medical discourse was discrete, bounded, or homogenous. As we see in Thomson's quote above, it was used alongside – and in conjunction with – the wonderful.

⁴⁵ An exception is the aspect of "monstrous," moral degeneracy we find in race theory, eugenics, and phrenology. See, for example, in Cesare Lombroso's *Criminal Man* (1876).

Although the monster appeared in fewer texts and contexts than it did in an early modern time period, the monstrous body was far from removed from public interest. Nineteenth-century England, for example, saw an outburst of what the satirical magazine *Punch* in 1847 called "Deformo-mania," a term coined in response to the enormous popular interest in unusual bodies on display especially in London (Kochanek 228). During a time period that saw substantial transformation in the regulation and management of all human bodies on a large scale because of changes in labor and technology in Europe and the US, the sideshow freak could calm the fears of ordinary citizens and assure them that they were still normal (Thomson 11).

The sideshow freak and the anatomically abnormal body were made possible in particular by two developments: first, the taxonomic impulse that took hold in the eighteenth century led to an unprecedented effort to classify all knowledge and beings, monsters included. Second, the emergence of the concept of the statistical norm in the late eighteenth century entailed a shift away from the idea of an unattainable, ideal body toward the idea of an allegedly attainable, normal body (Davis 5). The main hallmark of the normal body was not uniqueness but precisely the opposite, the average. In a society increasingly built on measuring industrial productivity and managing populations, the abnormal body was determined not predominantly by discourses of God or nature's infinite powers, but rather by its degree of deviation from the norm. The vocabulary (popular as well as scientific) changes accordingly, from monster, prodigy, marvel, and wonder in a range of

discourses in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to deformity, deviation, anomaly, and abnormality in nineteenth century medical and scientific discourse.⁴⁶

In this chapter, I trace the construction of the "normal" body back to anatomy. The body fashioned in nineteenth-century anatomical texts appears general and unmarked, the ultimate emblem of the mechanized, Cartesian body as machine. From its representations in anatomy textbooks, however, this allegedly universal, normal body turns out to be rather more particular: it belongs to the white, able-bodied male. When we probe its context, we see that this representation comes out of a particular combination of situated bodies, namely white, male doctors cutting into highly heterogeneous dissection material. The purported objectivity of science, then, masks social norms. As a result, women, non-white peoples, and individuals considered freaks are all constructed in opposition to the norm of the white, able-bodied male.

⁴⁶ A note on the term "disability" since it follows closely terms like "freak": Thomson draws a direct line from freakery to disability in the introduction to her edited collection *Freakery*, even though she writes that the book "does not explicitly declare itself as a study of disability" (xviii). Yet conflating the body of the freak with the disabled body has its perils. First and foremost, it ignores the element of occupation; the fact that the freak was "a role that was produced in collaboration with the audience whose spectatorship itself shaped the construction of the performer's body as aberrant," as Durbach writes (9). Thomson analyzes the performative aspects of freakery extensively, but according to Durbach, Thomson still argues that "although the terms may have changed, the cultural meanings attached to physical difference have remained constant" (ibid. 16). I agree with Durbach that coding the body of the freak as the disabled body results in a problematic conflation of terms, partly because of the element of culturally and temporally contingent staging of the freak body, and partly since disability as we know it today only arose in the early twentieth century. In Durbach's words, "'freakery' and 'disability' were radically different ways of dealing with difference that should not be collapsed" (ibid.). For that reason, I will not examine the history of modern disability as it appears, for example, in the writing and implementation of the so-called *ugly laws* in cities across the US from the late nineteenth century onwards, laws that intersect with the sideshow in that they were designed to regulate the visibility of the abnormal body (see Susan Schweik's excellent book on the subject from 2009, *The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public*).

Against my investigation of nineteenth-century anatomy and the medical framing of normality and abnormality, I position the treatment of the freaky body as it is represented in two novels from the late twentieth century, *Nights at the Circus* by Angela Carter (1984) and *Geek Love* by Katherine Dunn (1983). We recognize nineteenth-century concerns about the normal and abnormal in these two novels. But the novels do not merely thematize these tensions and concerns; they also, crucially, stage a rupture with them. Carter's novel stages the rupture more overtly than Dunn, but both books are self-conscious takes on, and challenges to, certain discourses that we see emerge in the nineteenth century and that are still alive today, if in different forms.⁴⁷

Thus my concern in this chapter is twofold. First, I argue that anatomy and the sideshow in the nineteenth-century were both primary arenas for constructing the normal and the abnormal body. These categories were contingent upon the reigning epistemes of their time, which means that the anatomically "normal," human body was perceived to be overwhelmingly white, male, and able-bodied, largely eliding bodies otherwise marked by gender and race. Second, I argue that that the *abnormal* body as it is represented in Dunn and Carter's postmodern novels about female freaks presents a challenge to the regime of the normal, male body by disrupting the

⁴⁷ More specifically, Dunn addresses the constitution of the abnormal individual by subverting the very core of nineteenth-century medical theories concerning the normal and abnormal, namely the question of successful life forms as successfully reproductive. She uses the fable genre for her utopian speculations about different bodies. Carter mines the female, freaky body for truth and restages the opposition between male and female positions as they are staked out in nineteenth-century science, providing "unfaithful" readings of freaky and normal bodies alike. Her intervention into discourses of science and gender is marked by what Kimberly Lau calls a "luxurious promiscuity:" Carter showers the reader with language saturated with sensory information and a narrative marked by magical realist elements (78).

hierarchy of bodily value and showing alternative (if utopian) ways to live with complex, embodied, gendered difference.

I want to ask the following questions of the two fields of anatomy and the freak show: on the one hand, continuing the line of questioning regarding the fluctuating borders between human and non-human from Chapter 1, how is the relationship between anatomical human and sideshow freak configured in discourses of the normal and abnormal in the nineteenth century? What are the constitutive parts of the anatomically normal human, and again, which parts or categories are denied, repressed, or kept out in the service of rendering a particular body the idea of the universal human? Here I consider the bodies that made up the main part of dissection material – poor, unclaimed, and especially in the United States, very often black bodies of both genders – in contrast to the bodily ideal espoused by doctors and visible in anatomy textbooks – the white, male, able-bodied, Euro-American body.

On the other hand, I ask how postmodern representations of literary, female freaks challenge the regime of the normal male, universal humanness as espoused in medical texts a hundred years before. The rupture and play with nineteenth-century discourses on the normal and abnormal staged in *Nights at the Circus* and *Geek Love* give us a particularly apposite opportunity to consider this question because they pose gendered challenges to the disembodied, normative ideal of the Cartesian man in human. We will see that these literary explorations of the freaky body are well suited to posing this challenge not only because of the specific characters they offer, but also

because of literature's broader ability to elucidate and bring to light difference and ambivalence.

Literature makes possible an ambivalence that can only be read between the lines in the historical sources for this chapter. Here a few words should be said about working with both historical and fictional sources, written in different time periods but describing roughly the same period, the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in roughly the same places, the United Kingdom and the United States (and to a lesser extent, France). The historical works in this chapter, a mix of anatomical textbooks; books on the rise of anatomy education and dissection practices and the connections between medicine, eugenics and statistics; photographs and descriptions of sideshow performers; and photographs of dissectors and their bodies (both the ones they inhabit and the ones they cut into) serve to give us a picture of how multiple discourses on the body – be it normal, freakish, deviant, or universalized – were formed through events, institutions, representations, and practices.

When we turn to literature, however, the work done is somewhat different. We still see the discourses from the historical sources at play, but the novels in this chapter take unsettled concepts (for the concepts of the body and embodiment coming out of discourses regarding anatomy and the sideshow are nothing if not unsettled) and think about the possible implications of those ideas for a set of fictional freaks. Considering fiction together with historical documents from the previous century in this way opens up possibilities for seeing how such different concepts of the body and

embodiment *could* work, departing from the facts without leaving them completely behind.

An important reason for choosing these two novels for this chapter is that they provide us with the freak's perspective, one that only extremely rarely turned up in the monster accounts two hundred years previously. The perspectives from the freaks in the novels are fictional and postmodern, but they still tap into discourses about freakdom that can be traced back to how performers in the sideshow industry constituted themselves and were constituted a century earlier.⁴⁸ Added to and mixed with such traces of earlier discourses are concerns contemporary to when the novels were written, which the authors weave into their main characters' experiences of being freaks.⁴⁹ To include the fictional freak's perspective, then, allows us to construct narratives of embodied existence and the experience of "being" (or, as it may be, performing) that are not exclusively medically determined, and the interweaving of older and newer discourses about freakery.

Literature thus takes what is left unfulfilled in the scientific texts and considers the speculative implications for the marked bodies that are left out, the bodies that are the silent constitutive outside of other, allegedly more ideal and normal human bodies. Crucially, the fact that literature is able to do this kind of work

⁴⁸ Daniel P. Mannix (1999) records a range of experiences of freaks in the sideshow around the turn of the century, many of them positive, but nevertheless often fraught with the tension that accompanies inhabiting an unusual body.

⁴⁹ For Carter, the main concerns through which her main character lives her life as a freak are second-wave feminism and heterosexual relations. The main themes through which Dunn filters her freak narrative are genetic engineering and the story of blue-collar, independent American class consciousness.

means that we can move beyond simply holding a freakish body up to a normal one as its mirror image, focusing instead on a less binary-prone and more complex web of experience, norms, and bodies. Thus the sort of play I want to engage in with the sometimes omnipresent and taken-for-granted ideas arising from the medical and historical texts depends on the flexibility of literature.

The bodies I examine here exist in relationships with each other that are constantly changing and transforming, but always with reference to each other. As such, to be a freak does not embody a constant meaning because such a definition depends on a number of variables: the modes of exhibition; institutions; discourses on normality and abnormality (or variants of these); the connections between freaks and divine beings or criminal beings, and so on. In all of these instances, the body becomes the nexus of power and knowledge that designates abnormality. That is, the body becomes the site where boundaries are blurred and seemingly distinct categories – like the divine and the animalistic – exist side by side. The freak is a human being who is *on the verge of being something else*, a being who straddles, muddles, or confuses ontological as well as symbolic boundaries. The bodies in this chapter – the freaky, the dissected, the objectified and the lived – are all defined in opposition or relation to one other.

Consequently, there are several bodies in this investigation, real and imagined. To begin with, there is the Platonic *idea* of the body, the abstract ideal of what we

think of when we talk about *the body* in the unmarked, general sense.⁵⁰ There are several underlying assumptions we make when we invoke this kind of general, maybe even universalized body, assumptions that I will address with regards to dissection and freaks. Since the figure of *the body* often appears without further characterization, one of these assumptions is that the unmarked, general body is normal as opposed to pathological, sick, abnormal, strange, unusual, odd, and other characterizations that may indicate this body's position in time, place, society, and experience. In other words, this unmarked body is a timeless, seemingly universal body, one that does not belong to *anybody* in particular.

Then we have the lived body, the body bound by circumstance, by flesh gravitating towards the ground, by blood and sinews and nerves and joints, by experiences, norms, by a sense of self and all that goes into forming such a sense, by interpersonal relations with other beings around it, with the world, with material and immaterial influences. This body most probably enacts a gender, belongs to a particular cultural group, speaks a certain language, and takes its cues from a social context. In short, it constitutes the subject of embodied experience. Once we begin to

⁵⁰ On the semantic level, the terms *marked* and *unmarked* come from linguistics, where noun endings such as "-ress" and "-ette" denote that a word is feminine, instead of the unmarked masculine (Deborah Tannen). The masculine forms of the word retain their status as core and unchangeable, while the feminine endings denote a deviation from or a variation of these core forms. These variations are by no means devoid of meaning or value, argues Tannen, but carry with them a larger social view of women and their characteristics: "gender markers pick up extra meanings that reflect common associations with the female gender: not quite serious, often sexual" (ibid.). A caveat to be heeded when moving from the world of linguistics to the world of lived experience is of course that bodies actually do matter – hence it is important to note that the disabled, white, male body does not enjoy the same standing and privilege as the non-disabled, white, male body. Nevertheless, we see how the terms marked and unmarked, albeit not without complications, have acquired purchase outside of the world of linguistics.

think about the multiple interstices between the general body and the lived body, we see several issues arising. First of all, the general body does not hold up for long once we start asking questions about what actually constitutes it. In this case, when we examine the provenance and kind of cadavers and who dissected them, and look at the lived, freaky bodies in Carter and Dunn's novels, we see that all bodies are, in fact, situated. As we will examine below, several *somebodies* serve to situate and differentiate, maybe even explode the myth of, the general, unmarked body that we find in nineteenth-century medical texts.

Anatomy had a wide range of manifestations in the UK and the US during the nineteenth century. The phenomenon that Michael Sappol calls "popular anatomy" entailed that anatomical exploration was a cultural discourse that extended beyond medical schools and into public discussions about the benefit of learning anatomy to the layperson's understanding of his or her own body, and to a range of anatomy museums, exhibitions, and literature on dissection. The sideshow was similarly an enormously popular institution during the nineteenth century, on both sides of the Atlantic, one that allowed for a multitude of ways of exploring bodies and embodiments through difference and similarity, wonder and disgust.

In anatomy and dissection, monsters are classified as pathological beings, their bodies confined to medical dissection, exploration and knowledge production. The knowledge produced chiefly concerns the normal human body, and thus the monster comes to serve as the underlying, silent antithesis of what is taken to be

human. In addition to occupying this kind of structural position as the constitutive outside of the human body, the monstrous appears in the body when something is not conforming to the normal function. In the sideshow, the monstrous body occupies center stage. The world of the freak is one where the "truly abnormal" body acts as both a source of income and a repository for a wide variety of popular beliefs regarding normalcy and deviancy.

The classification of the normal and the abnormal was at the forefront of anatomy and dissection, perhaps the most foundational parts of modern medicine since the Renaissance. In nineteenth-century anatomy texts, we find much attention paid to medical deviations, but only insofar as they can tell the anatomy student something about the normal function of an organ, limb, or bodily process. In the much-read *Anatomy* (1858), for example, Henry Gray emphasizes that.

[A]n accurate knowledge of the points of attachment of the muscles is of great importance in the determination of their action. By a knowledge of the action of the muscles, the surgeon is able at once to explain the causes of displacement in the various forms of fracture, or the causes which produce distortion in various forms of deformities. (186)

The attention in this instance is closely focused on medical students' need to know the normal development of a particular phenomenon – in this case, the attachment of the muscles – in order to be able to detect abnormal versions of the same.

Anatomy was a rapidly growing field in medical education both in Europe and in America from the eighteenth century on. According to Sappol, "[T]he American medical profession, following trends in Britain, France, and Germany that dated back

to the mid-eighteenth century, became ever more attached to an anatomical understanding of the body and an increasing role for anatomy in the medical curriculum" (2). Similarly, in British medical education, anatomy and surgery were inextricably bound together – as they had been for centuries – in that learning the former through the dissection of cadavers was thought to enable the practice of the latter on living patients (Richardson 31).

Dissection had been practiced in Scotland since it received royal recognition and patronage in 1506. England came after, in 1540, when "the companies of Barbers and Surgeons were united by Royal Charter, and Henry VIII granted them the annual right to the bodies of four hanged felons" (ibid. 32). With this charter, social historian Ruth Richardson records in her comprehensive study of practices relating to death and dissection in nineteenth-century England, *Death Dissection, and the Destitute* (2000), a relationship was forged between the "the medical profession, the ruling elite and the judiciary on the one hand, and between dissection and exemplary punishment on the other" (32). This resulted in the long-lasting (and perhaps still present) view of dissection as punishment, and a particularly egregious one at that.

In eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain, medical education was entirely organized and carried out privately (Richardson xv). With the rising interest in human anatomy over the course of the eighteenth century, the early nineteenth century saw what historian Lisa Rosner calls "the Anatomy Wars" break out in Scotland and England, a fight over "student fees and professional recognition," as well as over who got the most cadavers (29). Only some anatomists held positions at

a university; far more (and often younger) anatomists earned a living by having their own dissection rooms where they taught students while fighting over the same few university jobs. These private dissection rooms were needed to meet the demand that the university could not fill (ibid. 31).

Because of the high volume of students who wanted to train as medical doctors, measures were needed to ensure that the students received sufficient dissection practice. As part of such an effort, the Royal College made a new requirement for students in 1828: they needed certificates "from a Professor or Teacher of Anatomy recognized by the College, that he has actually been engaged in the dissection of a human body" (ibid.). From this decree it becomes obvious that the need for cadavers quickly outstripped the meager supply of executed criminals allotted to the anatomists and their students. The response was the emergence of a black market in corpses (Richardson xv). Body snatching was mentioned already by Vesalius (who reportedly stole his first skeleton from the gallows outside the city walls under the cover of darkness), and medical students were known to steal freshly buried corpses from graveyards to add to their low supply of executed criminals for centuries onwards.

As more and more bodies were needed on both sides of the Atlantic, around the 1820s the practice of "body snatching" was soon passed from the dissectors themselves to more or less professionalized "resurrectionists," "whose job it was to ensure that lecturers in anatomy and surgery were kept supplied with sufficient

'subjects' for their teaching and research" (Rosner 32).⁵¹ This treatment of the dead sparked large public protest on both continents, and the public became increasingly pitted against the rapidly growing medical establishment. Family members, often armed, started guarding the graves of their recently deceased relatives, and special coffins were devised that were difficult for grave robbers to open. The "subjects" who could not escape exhumation by such means were often the poor, since they could afford less solid caskets and deep graves, and since friends or relatives kept armed guard over them less frequently than was the case with the wealthier classes. In addition, there might be more than one body in each grave when it came to the poorer segment of the buried, a bonanza for resurrectionists and anatomists alike (ibid. 38).

Public fears over this body trade reached a frenzy in the UK when William Burke and William Hare were arrested in Edinburgh in 1828 after having murdered seventeen people and sold their corpses to the anatomist Robert Knox (who asked no questions about where the bodies came from), giving name to the still existing term for murder "burking." Shortly afterwards, in 1831, the Anatomy Act was passed by Parliament, allowing anatomists to dissect the bodies not only of hanged criminals, but also those of poor people who had died in hospitals and workhouses and whose bodies were not claimed and buried by family or friends. According to Rosner, "The assumption that this was the least the poor could do in exchange for their admission to a public charity, or confinement to a public prison, permeates the language" of the proposals leading up to the Anatomy Act (34). That meant that the new host of bodies

⁵¹ In addition to local "resurrection," corpses were being shipped from elsewhere; in the British context especially from Ireland.

available to the anatomists was effectively condemned to be dissected; it was not a voluntary decision.

It also meant that a much larger number of bodies became available to be dissected, all of them belonging to a class that rarely could afford to take care of their bodies to the same extent as the middle- and upper classes. There was little protest from people in positions of power against assigning the poor to dissection after death, but the destitute saw it as deeply unfair (Rosner 36). The radical politician William Corbett protested against the view that it was only the poor who should give their bodies "to science." He wrote, "Science! Why, who is science for? Not for poor people. Then if it be necessary for the purposes of science, let them have the bodies of the rich, for whose benefit science is cultivated" (qtd. in Rosner 34).⁵²

Similar attitudes and discussions were taking place in the US. Anatomy also became the cornerstone of American medical education in the nineteenth century. Sappol sees the importance accorded to anatomy in this period as a response to two main issues: first, the veritable explosion of medical schools in America during the nineteenth century – there were four in 1800 and 160 in 1900 – meant that criticisms about schools watering down the quality of their education were rife. Here we see a

⁵² Richardson asks the question that she claims other historians of medicine have ignored, namely "the question of what the return effects might be upon the profession's body of anatomical knowledge that it is based upon bodies obtained by coercion" (xv). David Wootton notes that "[H]istorians have been very reluctant to face the fact that vivisection (and not something apparently harmless, such as 'the experimental method') was the true foundation of the new physiology. Similarly, they have sought to play down the extent to which the new anatomy, which arose out of dissection, depended on activities (such as the boiling up of bodies) that even the leading participants felt were abhorrent" (109). The question of the (un-)ethical treatment of bodies that went into what we consider scientific advances merits its own investigation, which unfortunately cannot be accommodated within the limits of this chapter.

connection to the British context and the implementation of the certificate in 1828 to ensure that students had, in fact, participated in a dissection. Second, the onslaught of other groups who claimed authority in the American medical field, such as folk healers, midwives, and the clergy, meant that the medical schools needed something particular to defend and build their authority (Sappol 2). They found this authority in anatomy.

Yet the medical profession in the US faced the same problem as its counterpart in Britain, namely the acute shortage of bodies to dissect. In the States too, grave robbing and body snatching were rampant across the country. 1831 – the same year as the Anatomy Act was introduced in England – saw the first anatomy legislation introduced in Massachusetts, "which consigned to medical schools the bodies of the unclaimed (those without money for burial who died in workhouses, hospitals, and similar institutions)" (Sappol 4). Evidence shows that a disproportionate number of poor men whose bodies were made available for dissection in North America in this way were black (Washington 129).⁵³ That public

⁵³ From the following advertisement in the *Charleston Mercury* from 1838, we see that the black body's vulnerability to medical experimentation went back further: "To planters and others.- Wanted, fifty Negroes, any person, having sick Negroes, considered incurable by their respective physicians, and wishing to dispose of them, Dr. S. will pay cash for Negroes affected with scrofula, or king's evil, confirmed hypochondriasm, apoplexy, diseases of the liver, kidneys, spleen, stomach and intestines, bladder and its appendages, diarrhea, dysentery, etc. The highest cash price will be paid, on application as above, at No. 110 Church Street, Charleston" (qtd. in Spillers 208). Thus, the medical establishment targeted black bodies for knowledge harvesting not only when they were dead (and then sometimes disproportionately so), but also while they were alive. Warner links the racialized aspect of the "violence of these [dissection] scenes" to the turn-of-the-century context of racial violence in America at the time (24-25). As part of this context, he points out the similarity between photographs of dissected black bodies and lynching photographs as genres of "commemorative" photography (25).

outrage was partly behind this was clear, since "[S]uch measures assured the 'respectable' classes that their graves would not be plundered to provision the dissecting table, while providing anatomists with a steady supply of free cadavers, and rescuing the profession from the taint of association with unsavory lower-class body snatchers" (ibid.). By 1913 all but four southern states had passed laws that allowed doctors to dissect the bodies of the poor.⁵⁴

Thus, the bodies that made up the dissection material, and therefore the knowledge basis, for anatomical advances in both the UK and the US were not the ones who benefited from such advances while alive. Moreover, since the bodies available for dissection were poor and uncared for, they were often in various states of disrepair, illness, and decay. Such bodies gave the anatomists the chance to study a broad range of abnormal bodily phenomena, which, as we will see in my discussion of Canguilhem's work, was paramount to the construction of the normal and the pathological. While depictions of particular illnesses sometimes reflected the actual kind of bodies with which the anatomists worked, anatomical illustrations (the ones that included whole or nearly whole bodies) tended to portray handsome, often healthy-looking, and overwhelmingly white, male specimens, even in instances where any body would do.⁵⁵ The corresponding language shows the prevalence of male

⁵⁴ The north-south divide clearly played a role in how attitudes to dissection took place in the States. Not only did the southern states lag behind in passing anatomy legislation, but, according to Sappol, "[T]he post-Civil War political climate was conducive to measures that disciplined the 'dangerous classes,' and that fostered the teaching of anatomy" (5).

⁵⁵ This is not the case everywhere. In many textbooks, such as Gray's *Anatomy*, most of the illustrations are of such specific and limited parts of the body that, barring the genitals and mammary glands, it is impossible to discern the gender or the body. One could read the *Anatomy's* highly particular illustrations, which Judith Folkenberg describes as "grimly

pronouns when describing a wide range of phenomena.⁵⁶ The first definition of "man" in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "[A] human being (irrespective of sex or age)," therefore seems to apply to nineteenth-century conceptions of the human body: the male body stands in for the human body.⁵⁷

That the normal body was seen as male, white, and able-bodied is well exemplified in Joseph Maclise's *Surgical Anatomy* from 1859. At the time of publication, Maclise was a surgeon at the University College Hospital in London, and was part of the "flowering of anatomical book publishing" that took part in the first half of the nineteenth century (Folkenberg 281). In his book, he includes 68 plates visually representing various parts and functions of the human body. Of these 68, the two plates laying out the structure of the mammary glands show a white, female body. Two plates are difficult to ascribe gender as they portray fingers and hands, and ten go into detail regarding the male reproductive organs (interestingly, no equivalent

unimaginative" and "authoritative but utterly devoid of opinion or personality," as displaying the ultimate elision of gender *tout court* (297). Such extreme close-ups can thus be seen as symptomatic of the widespread assumption of the normal body, since the illustrations close down the possible range of interpretations of the body part in question as belonging to a gendered body. The "default" body available to imagine when looking at such specific body parts, then, is (again) the abstract idea of the normal human body.

⁵⁶ In John and Charles Bell's *The Anatomy and Physiology of the Human Body*, an influential anatomy book published in London in 1829, "man" merits 42 mentions while "woman" appears in only six instances. "His" is mentioned about 60 times and "her" seven. A corresponding example in the US is found in the textbook *Anatomy, Physiology, Hygiene*, published by the State Board of Education in Sacramento in 1891. Here a quick search reveals that "he" is mentioned around 30 times while "she" appears twice. Similarly, "man" has 20 mentions while "woman" has eight. Such quantitative information can naturally only go so far without further analysis, but it serves as an indication of the gendered language in medical books at the time.

⁵⁷ Of course, it is also possible to imagine that the anatomically normal body – the white male – helped manifest the *OED* definition of human. The *OED* concedes below this definition that many have found this way of letting "man" stand in for "human" offensive, and that it has therefore largely gone out of use. However, the definition still stands.

plates portray the female reproductive organs). The 54 plates that are left show functions such as "the form of the thorax, and the relative position of its contained parts – the lungs, heart, and larger blood vessels" (plates 1 and 2), "the relative position of the cranial, nasal, oral, and pharyngeal cavities, etc." (plates 20 and 21) and "the surgical dissection of the anterior crural region; the ankles and the foot" (plates 67 and 68). These parts of the body are not markedly different in women and men, yet Maclise lets the white, male body occupy all 54 of these plates. That means that out of 68 plates, 64 contain what this chapter has defined as the universal human body.

Here we see some of the concrete mechanisms through which the universal, unmarked body is produced. Judith Folkenberg remarks dryly that what Maclise and his brother Daniel produced "was far from the undisguised dissections of John Bell [a fellow surgeon at University College], but rather a portrait gallery of extremely buff Victorians, somehow transfigured from the cadavers of the recently deceased urban poor that presumably comprised their actual subjects" (282; see Fig. 2.2). This means that not only did the Maclise brothers let the male body stand in for female bodies that most certainly were dissected together with the male bodies, but they also made the bodies look like approximations of Greek gods instead of the malnourished, pocky bodies they most probably were.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ This example is part of a long and rich history of representing the dissected body. See Rifkin and Ackerman (2006) for a good overview.

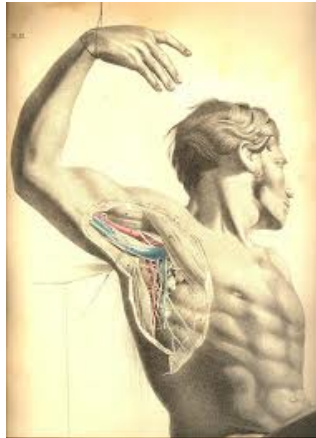


Fig. 2.2. Plate 13: The surgical form of the male axilla (one of Maclise's "buff Victorians")

This gendered aspect of the representations of bodies in nineteenth-century anatomy books was thus not a reflection of the material conditions with which dissectors were confronted. In other words, the comparatively meager presence of the non-white and the female body in anatomy textbooks versus the ubiquity of the white, male body did not result from the lack of non-white or female corpses to dissect.⁵⁹ In other words, the generic, unmarked body was not built on exclusively male dissection material.⁶⁰ The question remains, then, why this body came to be defined as white and male. To answer it, we need to look to another group of bodies: not the cadavers, but the anatomists.

The identities of nineteenth-century anatomists on both sides of the Atlantic emerged from a particular set of concerns and circumstances. With the authority

⁵⁹ Even though the generic body coming out of dissection was seen as male, female bodies were steadily dissected in Europe from the 1400s onwards (Park 14).

⁶⁰ Indeed, the cover of the perhaps most important textbook of modern anatomy, Vesalius's *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (1543), is graced by a female cadaver. For a detailed analysis of this particular image, see Sawday (especially chapter 7).

conferred upon them by the field of anatomy, it is clear that cutting into dead bodies, and the surrounding activities of procuring those bodies, had a considerable impact on forming the selfhood of medical students from the eighteenth century onwards. As Sappol notes, "anatomical acquisition, dissection, and representation of bodies... contributed to the making of professional, classed, sexed, racial, national, and speciated selves" (1). Up until 1850, when the first college offering a medical education to women opened, and 1868, which saw the establishment of the first medical school for African-Americans, these selves belonged mostly to white, Euro-American men (Warner 11).⁶¹

Since the medical professions struggled to gain recognition of what they saw as the importance of learning anatomy, a struggle often met by considerable dissent and even occasional violence from the general public, being in the profession fostered a certain camaraderie and sense of importance (Sappol 3). Dissection served as a ritual that "inducted young men into the cult of medical knowledge," which included being sworn to secrecy about the sometimes overly creative supply methods for cadavers (*ibid.*). However, promising to guard the secret origins of their cadavers did not keep students from taking staged pictures of themselves with their dissected specimens, thereby participating in a long, particularly but not exclusively American, tradition of photographs depicting medical students in various poses with their

⁶¹ For women, the first college was the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. The first college for African-Americans was Howard College of Medicine in Washington, DC. There were some medical colleges that had integrated classes around the same time (Warner 11).

corpses.⁶² Warner observes that these photos "mark a rite of passage to a new identity – they present a professional coming-of-age narrative," and that "[L]ike other group portraits, these photographs are above all statements of identity" (15, 14). In this context, we can go even further: not only do the photographs work as statements of identity; they also show some of what went into the performance of the role of doctor.

From the photographs that Warner analyzes, we see the elements included in the performance of the doctor: a certain garb is donned (bowler hats and black coats, for example, as in the photograph below; aprons, overalls, gradually white coats), a certain attitude adopted (distanced, authoritarian, all-knowing, confident), and certain actions performed (cutting into the body, arranging it, naming it, dominating it).



Fig. 2.3. A group of students at the Baltimore College of Dental Surgery, ca. 1891 (Warner 106)

⁶² Many such photographs are collected and presented in *Dissection. Photographs of a Rite of Passage in American Medicine: 1880-1930* by medical historian John Harley Warner and curator James M. Edmonson (2009).

The names of the students are often written with chalk either on their overalls, on a board behind them, or on the table of the cadaver. The cadaver rarely appears under its own name; sometimes it acquired new names, such as "Jack the Ripper," or epigraphs, for example, "Know Thyself," "A thing of beauty is a joy forever," or the popular "Her loss is our gain" and "He lived for others, he died for us" (all taken from Warner). The medical students thus enacted scenarios and repeated dictums that were passed on from dissections during Vesalius's time and earlier, continuing to perform and shape their identities as anatomists and doctors in a tradition going back centuries.⁶³

Considering the different provenance and kinds of bodies that came under the scalpel, we can dispel the assumption that all dissected bodies were male and white. Then it seems that the model for the disembodied idea of the unmarked, universal body mirrors the bodies of the anatomists, not the cadavers. In other words, the abstract, general idea of *the body* seems not to take its cue from the actual bodies that formed the basis for anatomical learning but rather from the doctors conducting the dissections.⁶⁴ Such a claim radically questions the purported objectivity of the anatomical endeavor, introducing instead embodied, subjective practice as the corner stone of anatomy. However, such subjective positions were strongly disavowed in

⁶³ Two favorite quotations found both in early modern and nineteenth-century dissection theaters actually come from ancient Greece and Rome, namely "Nosce te ipsum" ("know yourself") and "Memento mori" ("remember you must die").

⁶⁴ I do not mean to imply that no knowledge was gained from the bodies that were dissected, which would be a patently false claim, but rather that the specifics of the bodies on the slab were often elided in the effort to describe *the* human body – which in turn took on the form of the dissectors.

anatomy during the nineteenth century. Writing about the self-perception of intellectuals, anatomists, and natural philosophers of the period, Londa Schiebinger remarks that "anatomists believed their work free from bias, reflecting only the 'cold-blooded' findings of science" (213). The truth was seen to exist in the body on the slab as exposed by the body holding the scalpel. Subjective knowledge had nothing to do with it.

The fact is that theories such as craniology and eugenics, the latter of which was very popular in the social, statistical, and medical fields in the nineteenth century, all served to construct a multitude of others to the single, universal standard of the normal, human body. Phrenology and craniology, in particular, proved popular among scientists during the nineteenth century and were used to legitimize how certain people deviated from the norm. For example, the scientific hierarchy that placed the white man at the top was legitimized by evolutionary thought, which, according to Schiebinger put "the ranking of both the sexes and the races along a single axis of development" (206). Nineteenth-century medicine and medical texts constructed the female body as particularly deviant because of its very materiality: not only was it burdened by its monthly cycle, which some authors saw as enough to make women unfit for thought and action, it was also perceived as structurally weaker than the male body.⁶⁵ Schiebinger argues further that, "neither in the development of

⁶⁵ For example, the physician John Edward Tilt addressed the Obstetrical Society of London upon its decision to deny women admission to the Society in 1874 by saying: "the profession felt that the verdict really meant that women were not qualified by nature to make good midwifery practitioners; that they were unfit to bear the physical fatigues and mental anxieties of obstetrical practice, at menstrual periods, during pregnancy and puerperality"

the species nor in the development of the individual were women thought to attain the full human maturity exemplified by the European male" (206). Women were seen to have stopped development at a "lower stage of evolution," an idea that took its proof from sexual difference as well as from the measuring of certain body parts to objectively assess intelligence and reason (ibid.).⁶⁶

The debate over women's participation in medical education took place amidst larger concerns over women's place in public life, brought on by first-wave feminists.⁶⁷ It is perhaps not surprising, then, that women's bodies were scarce not

(qtd. in Jacobi 99). Such viewpoints served to legitimize the exclusion of women from a large number of occupations, public spheres, and political engagements, anchoring women's unsuitability for such activity in their bodily difference from men.

⁶⁶ We may take the differing views of the female skeleton as an example of how women were constituted in nineteenth-century medical science. When the German anatomist Samuel Thomas von Sömmering for the first time drew a female skeleton in the 1790s, he pointed out that the female skull was heavier in proportion to the body than the male skull was to the male body. He concluded that women were more intelligent for that reason, even though he also attributed the skull's size to women's sedentary lives (Schiebinger 206-207). In 1820 Sömmering's view was challenged by the Scottish anatomist John Barclay, who attributed the weight of the female skull to the fact that "physiologically women resemble children, whose skulls are also large relative to their body size" (ibid. 207). The comparison of women to children was by no means new (in antiquity several authors made the same analogy, Galen included), but the crucial difference this time was that male anatomists superimposed cultural attitudes to the female sex onto *scientific* findings, thus cementing those attitudes in "the language of modern science" (ibid. 210). As we see from the example of the viewpoints on the signification of the shape and weight of the female skeleton, the debates regarding gender and science were not always internally coherent or unidirectional. Nevertheless, despite gaps and incommensurability, scientific findings were still often used to privilege the male gender both in body and social standing.

⁶⁷ According to Warner, it is possible to read some anxiety regarding the increasing demands made by women to be included in more professions in the photographs of anatomists and their dissected subjects from American medical schools between 1880-1930. Regarding the place of gender in these portrayals, Warner argues that the poses serve a particular purpose: "Various groupings were gendered in ways that did different cultural work. At a time of crisis for masculinity, amidst fin de siècle anxieties about the feminization of American culture, some images in which the dissectors are all men – reminiscent of photos of hunters, posed with their trophies – seem calculated to convey a sense of robust, vigorous manhood" (13).

only in anatomical illustration but also in the roles of medical student and doctor. Seeing that anatomy, and medical education at large, was such a stronghold for male students, strategies that included using medicine as a weapon to pathologize the opposition came to be all too well known by women and other "others" who wanted access to education (and not just medical education) in political debates in the nineteenth century. One author participating in the argument, the physician Edward Hammond Clarke, claimed in 1874 that women who "graduated from school or college excellent scholars" had "undeveloped ovaries," which apparently left them sterile when they later married (93). Women's bodies were much too delicate for the hardships of education, he argued, and explained his reasoning by way of how the blood during their monthly periods "drained" them and made them weak.

Clarke's claims did not go unchallenged. In her award-winning essay "Do Women Require Mental and Bodily Rest during Menstruation" (1876), the physician and reformer Mary Putnam Jacobi goes straight to the point: "Such indeed is the audacity of the human intellect, that the discovery of limits usually proves hopeless in only one case, namely, when they are perceived to apply to a different race, class, or sex, from that to which the investigator himself belongs" (97). In a single sentence, Jacobi puts her finger on one of the most important criticisms that could be leveled at the practice of nineteenth-century science, namely that certain "investigators" considered themselves immune to the limits they imposed on others.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ When we look at the debate about whether American women should be allowed a medical education in the mid-1800s, similar fears to those exhibited by Clarke above crop up, but this time they center on the dangerous "hardening" of women's "moral constitution" if they were

The type of reasoning we see in Clarke's protest not only targeted women, but also positioned other races as inferior to white people. The interest in classification brought with it a fervor not only for systematizing known entities, but for exploring and discovering "new" species from the natural, animal, and human kingdom. The intersection between exploration, imperialism, and classification can be seen in scientific texts, travel literature, pulp fiction, and freak shows of the nineteenth century. In London in 1810, for example, "The Hottentot Venus" was the stage name given to Saartjie Baartman, a Khoisan woman from near the Cape in South Africa, brought to Western Europe to be exhibited. Baartman's stage persona foregrounded the "primitive" sexuality that her exhibitors used as a selling point for her exhibition, with her name bringing together the exoticism of far-away locales in "Hottentot" and the classical embodiment of woman in "Venus."⁶⁹

According to Ann Laura Stoler, Baartman became the emblem of "race": "the organizing grammar of an imperial order in which modernity, the civilizing mission and the 'measure of man' were framed" (27). It was Baartman's *body* that was the site

allowed to dissect bodies and become familiar with anatomy. The solution for debaters eager to see female physicians was to appeal to women's alleged natural knack for nurturing: "The professional identity of the first generation of American women physicians in the 1850s and 1860s was imbued with a conviction that women had a special aptitude for healing, a belief rooted in Victorian gender stereotypes identifying femininity with sympathetic, caring capacities" (Warner 9). In this way, having women perform as doctors was made palatable.

⁶⁹ The three main sources that tell us about Baartman – the promotional posters for and recollections of her exhibitions; the scientific examinations of her body after her death by French zoologist and naturalist Georges Cuvier; and the many novels, plays, and poems written about her – echo the exoticization of certain bodies in adventure novels, such as *She* by H. Rider Haggard and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The sources in which Baartman appears, however different in terms of genre, share a persistent fascination with her genitals, making her freakiness an intersection of gender, race, sexuality, and the fervor of exploration and conquest.

of intersecting discourses about race, gender, and imperialism in the early nineteenth century. She was exhibited as a phenomenon, an exotic and profoundly alien creature, playing a part in the "gendering of imperialism" (Ann McClintock 30). Rachel Holmes notes not only the fear and suspicion with which Baartman was met, but also the clear connection between abjection and lasciviousness that comes out in the accounts of people who saw her (220, n24). Her genitals were the main attractions both for her audience and for the (male) scientists who examined her alive as well as dead. In a tradition stretching from Carl Linnaeus, if not before, these physical features were taken to denote a voracious sex drive. Baartman's features were also given animal characteristics, as was common in racial descriptions of the time.⁷⁰

The boundary between human and animal was contested from several quarters in nineteenth-century science. Especially in its incarnation of human versus ape, the boundary between human and animal had already become less solid in the eighteenth century, when Linnaeus "located humanity firmly within the animal kingdom, constructing the primate order to accommodate humans, apes, monkeys, prosimians, and bats" (Ritvo, *Border Trouble* 484). This affinity between human and ape was solidified in Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, which made quite a stir when it came out in 1859. Both from within and outside of science, people protested against having

⁷⁰ When Cuvier performed a dissection of the remains of Baartman after her death in 1817, he focused on how particular body parts (her genitals especially) embodied certain characteristics, such as lack of intelligence, heightened sexuality, and so on. Attributing traits to body parts was characteristic of scientific enquiry of the time, which often gendered and sexualized elements of natural science, including projecting human characteristics onto animals (observing the "modesty" in female orangutans, for example), or comparing female animals to African women (Schiebinger 161, 164). Cuvier's report from Baartman's dissection expresses the contemporary zeal to racialize certain bodily features, often by invoking animal features.

to think of themselves as a type of animal. One anatomist, William Lawrence, went so far as to propose his own taxonomy, which classified the human not as a species but as its own order (ibid. 488). Echoing the humanist attention to man in Pico and other authors four hundred years earlier, Lawrence perceived man as under threat, encroached upon by animals.

The dissolving boundary between human and animal thus had a double purchase in medical, scientific, and popular discourse of the time: on the one hand, (white) scientists did not hesitate to compare other, non-white peoples to animals, as we see in the example of Saartje Baartman. On the other, when it came to the question of their own affinity with animals, outrage ensued at what was seen to be at best an insult and at worst a classificatory error.⁷¹ In the popular realm, the voices were also mixed: some shared in the outrage over being associated with apes, but as we have seen both in the previous and current chapters, the fascination with humans that were seen to border on being animals, who embodied the in-between of human and animal by having animal bodily traits, had been great attractions for centuries. What was new in the nineteenth century was the different valences institutions accorded such humanimals: in the sideshow, a likeness to an animal was an advantage in terms of selling tickets since it played on the audience's fascination with hybrid beings and its own classificatory closeness to apes. In anatomy and wider scientific enquiry, animal characteristics were tools in the effort to build a hierarchy of races.

⁷¹ It should be noted that both of these latter positions were somewhat extreme. In general, most scientists agreed about the human-animal continuum, making the latter position the dominant theory.

Ascribing animal characteristics served to make non-white peoples slightly less human. The animal thus occupied a complex position as both that which was the same as (or at least in the same family as) the human, and simultaneously what was most other to the human, that which made the human monstrous.⁷²

Crucial to the intersection of race, gender, and imperialism in the creation of normal and abnormal bodies in the nineteenth century was the idea of the body as colonizable, as the locus of hidden recesses to be found, and, above all, as containing the ultimate truth about itself. In an age where imperial efforts were at their height, the body became another colonial frontier. Just as the colonies were explored by militant force, the body was explored with what Laqueur calls a "militant empiricism," marked by (male) anatomists claiming to have "discovered" body parts such as the clitoris (64). According to Sawday, this new treatment of the body bore direct resemblances to imperial politics: "the process was truly colonial, in that it appeared to reproduce the stages of discovery and exploitation which were, at that moment, taking place within the context of the European encounter with the New

⁷² Race was linked not only to animality and sexuality but also to criminality in the classificatory effort. In 1876 the Italian physician and psychiatrist Cesare Lombroso published *Criminal Man*, which argued that criminals could be distinguished by physical and psychological anomalies. Because "these anomalies resembled the traits of primitive peoples, animals, and even plants," it could be proved that "the most dangerous criminals were atavistic throwbacks on the evolutionary scale" (Gibson and Rafter 1). The book went through five editions and swelled in size to include four volumes by 1896-97, becoming a founding text in criminology. His editors write, "Lombroso's contention that non-European peoples were inferior to white men was a commonplace in the society of his day but his systematic equations of born criminals and savages injected racism into the new field of criminology" (ibid. 17-18). Thus we see that the socio-cultural hierarchy between the sexes and the races was built into the very basic foundations of modern science. Exposing and redressing this kind of bias in science has been one of the important aims of feminist science studies. See in particular Sandra Harding (1985, 1991), Londa Schiebinger (1989), Karen Barad (1998), Ann Fausto-Sterling (1985), Emily Martin (1991), and Donna Haraway (1998).

World" (25).⁷³ The anatomists became the conquerors, the "new owners" of the now colonized and subordinated body, the ones wielding the almighty scalpel that could cut through all bodily material to find the truth.

As we see in Cuvier's dissection report of Baartman's body, a report that mixes moral, imperial, and political characteristics, the scientific truth found in the body was far from disinterested. Nevertheless, the reigning paradigm dictated that the body's truth was transparent and that "the anatomists did not have to take a *moral* stand in this matter [of sexual difference] because the body spoke for itself" (Schiebinger 213). The anatomists sought unfettered answers in the bodies they dissected, discounting the assumptions they brought with them to the dissection table.

McClintock sees clear gender roles in this process:

[A]ll too often, Enlightenment metaphysics presented knowledge as a relation of power between two gendered spaces, articulated by a journey and a technology of conversion: the male penetration and exposure of a veiled, female interior; and the aggressive conversion of its "secrets" into a visible, male science of the surface. (23)

Thus, Renaldus Columbus could "discover" the clitoris in 1559 and stake his claim:

"Since no one has discerned these projections and their workings, if it is permissible to give names to things discovered by me, it should be called the love or sweetness of

⁷³ Patricia Parker remarks on the link in early modern treatises of anatomy "between the anatomist's opening and exposing to the eye the secrets or 'privities' of women and the 'discovery' or bringing to light of what were from a Eurocentric perspective previously hidden worlds" (86).

Venus" (qtd. in Laqueur 64).⁷⁴ In Columbus's assertion, Laqueur observes the link not only to the conquistador in strange surroundings, but also to older stories of taking power over bodies and beings: "like Adam, [Columbus] felt himself entitled to name what he found in nature" (ibid.). The experiential aspect of such female "secrets" as the clitoris did not matter; any other approach than touching, looking at, and dissecting the human body was aggressively discounted. Anatomy and imperialism crossed paths in efforts to conquer, name, and exploit.

The cultures of anatomy and sideshows arose hot on the heels of what has been called the scientific revolution. Adopting this somewhat tenuous conceptual category for the moment will show that certain developments during this time had an impact on how humanness was understood for centuries afterwards.⁷⁵ Most importantly, perhaps, the disciplinary boundaries inherited from the Middle Ages changed position, and came to form new fields of inquiry. These new fields are part of the reason why new categorizations of the body were made possible. John Henry writes that "the natural philosophy of the Middle Ages, which had tended to remain aloof from mathematical and more pragmatic or experiential arts and sciences, became amalgamated with these other approaches to the analysis of nature, to give

⁷⁴ While Columbus called the clitoris "the seat of woman's delight," Valerie Traub observes that Laqueur's subsequent analysis of the "discovery" and early modern history of the clitoris makes the female body visible "*only in relation* to the male," thus failing to take into account the various histories of lesbian pleasure that considers female bodies and pleasure not as mere versions of men's (84-85; emphasis in original).

⁷⁵ Some scholars question the whiggish impulse in gathering such a wide array of discoveries, disciplines, theorists, and moments in time under one umbrella, see John Henry's *The Scientific Revolution and the Origins of Modern Science* (2001). In *Wonder and the Order of Nature 1150-1750* (2001), Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park question whether such disparate kinds of work can be collected under one rubric (330).

rise to something much closer to our notion of science" (5). What had been categorized as natural philosophy and included works such as Paré's *Of Monsters and Marvels*, became emptied of certain values and infused with others, dividing into new fields and alliances to create other areas of knowledge.

According to Harriet Ritvo, the urge to classify every part of nature and organize said parts into intricate taxonomies peaked in the eighteenth century, but continued into the nineteenth century (*Platypus* xii). Linnaeus has become the name that embodied this effort of classification, especially with his work *Systema Naturae* from 1735. In this work, Ritvo argues, Linnaeus "had made it possible, at least in theory, to assign each animal or plant its own unique position in his comprehensive system, and therefore by implication to offer an objective, rational, and complete analysis of the apparently chaotic and infinitely varied products of nature" (ibid. 15).⁷⁶

The most concerted effort to put monsters into the Linnaean taxonomy can be found in Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire's 1836 *Histoire générale et particulière des anomalies*, better known by its subtitle, *Traité de tératologie*.⁷⁷ In this work, Saint-Hilaire frames monsters within a biological and medical understanding of a body

⁷⁶ The meaning of the categories in this "comprehensive system" was not intrinsic or always self-same, which the existence of a myriad alternative taxonomies, scientific and not, proved. For example, reminiscent of Jorge Luis Borges's (fictional) *Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge's Taxonomy*, we find a division of wild animals in Britain that survived from medieval times up to the nineteenth century that "classified game according to the kind and degree of amusement it offered" (Ritvo, *Platypus* 189).

⁷⁷ Isidore's father, Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, was a renowned naturalist known for his experiments with chick embryos for the purposes of studying the creation process of monstrosities. With his *Traité*, Isidore became the person who allegedly instituted the modern use of "teratology" to describe the study of monsters.

located on a continuum of the normal and the abnormal, and presents a taxonomy of monsters based on type and described according to anatomy. The result is that monsters are "subjected to the same methodical scrutiny as other natural phenomena. Like seashells, mammals, or plants, the monster was now placed into an orderly Linnean-type grid" (Andrew Curran 229). Within the first category of monsters alone, *Des monstres unitaires* ("Conjoined Monsters"), Saint-Hilaire lists no less than twelve sub-categories, each given a chapter that contains further sub-categorizations of that particular type of conjoined monster.

It is tempting to see early modern wonder books as a forerunner to the *Traité* in terms of enumerating, classifying, and providing explanations for monsters, but the *Traité* is markedly different from early modern wonder books, most obviously in its new and detailed classification system. Paré's classification of monsters as either "outside the course of Nature" or "completely against Nature" rested on a conception of nature and different orders of the living that was far more active in terms of possible interactions than what we find in the nineteenth century. In the latter period, argues Seth, "[N]ature as protagonist is reduced to nature as object," rendering both nature and the body passive at the same time ("Difference" 83). Moreover, the wonder that pervades Paré's categorizations is not to be found in Saint-Hilaire's painstakingly detailed – and un-illustrated – work. The effect of Saint-Hilaire's

approach to monsters, then, is that "teratology recasts the freak from astonishing corporeal extravagance into the pathological specimen of the terata" (Thomson 4).⁷⁸

Integral to the monster's process from extraordinary to pathological is its history of exhibition and increasing institutionalization. Medicine may be one of the primary sites of studying monsters in the nineteenth century, but medicine as a discipline emerged from a heterogeneous history of displaying objects that we now think of as inhabiting radically different categories. According to Valerie Traub, "the consolidation of anatomy as a separate epistemology occurred in concert with the development of other domains of knowledge, and it was enabled by anatomy's ability to appropriate and reformulate the knowledges of other genres" (85). The best example of this is the many cabinets of curiosities, or *Wunderkammern*, that came into being all around Europe in the early modern period. In such arenas of exhibition, monsters were important parts of the display, alongside natural wonders from other parts of the world, paintings, and other beautiful, curious, or wonder-inducing objects.

The largely private *Wunderkammern* inspired the organization of the gradually emerging public natural history museums and halls of exhibition during the

⁷⁸ Saint-Hilaire's classificatory system and writing style contribute most decisively to the move Thomson traces, but the fact that Saint-Hilaire does not provide a single illustration for the phenomena he investigates also marks the break between the *Traité* and its distant cousin, the wonder book. But this lack of images makes the *Traité* different not only from the wonder book tradition – which thrived on a long lineage of illustrations reaching back to antiquity in addition to obtaining ever new monster images – but also from other medical works of the nineteenth century. Both George Gould and Walter Pyle's medical taxonomy-cum-wonder book *Anomalies and Curiosities of Medicine* (1896) and the textbook *Anatomy* by Gray (1858) are richly illustrated, however differently.⁷⁸ While Gould and Pyle aimed at a larger audience beyond the anatomically trained by providing a wide range of explicit monster pictures, Gray keeps to the body part discussed in his topical illustrations. Saint-Hilaire's work, which, subject-wise, belongs to a lineage of magnificently illustrated monster treatises, stands out by its lack of pictures intended to either amuse or instruct.

nineteenth century, many of them affiliated with medical colleges, such as the Hunterian Museum at the Royal College of Surgeons in London (founded in 1799); the Mütter Museum at the College of Physicians of Philadelphia (founded in 1858); *Galerie de paléontologie et d'anatomie comparée* (founded in 1898 but emerging from the larger *Muséum national d'histoire naturelle*, which was founded during the French Revolution in 1793) in Paris; and *Musée Dupuytren* (founded in 1835) in Paris.⁷⁹ These museums continued the work of the *Wunderkammern* – exhibiting a broad range of wonders of nature – but reflect the change in classification schemas that would gradually leave the monsters in medical museums and museums of pathological or comparative anatomy. Anatomy was a particular focus of the medical museums. Human and animal skeletons were assembled, labeled and exhibited; monstrous examples of animals or humans preserved in jars of formaldehyde. As we see in the photograph below, in the *Galerie de paléontologie et d'anatomie comparée* in Paris a human *écorché* (a dried-out, flayed and preserved human body) heads the impressive "procession" of skeletons (Fig. 2.4).⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Around the same time period, zoos came into being as parks housing animals (and sometimes people, especially "exotic species") to be exhibited to the public. See Nigel Rothfels *Savages and Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins Press, 2002).

⁸⁰ *Écorché*, meaning "flayed" in French, may denote the artistic practice of portraying flayed humans that was often used in medical books to aid the learning of anatomy, well known from the illustrations of Vesalius and Valverde from the sixteenth century. It may also denote the preparation of actual bodily specimens that were flayed, dried-out, and put in various positions, like the body in the photo above. The French veterinarian and surgeon Honoré Fragonard (1732-1799) was particularly well known for this (he even got his own museum, *Le musée Fragonard*, on the outskirts of Paris). *Écorchés* were largely phased out of medical education after the nineteenth century, but have lately made a comeback with the German doctor Günther von Hagens. Hagens developed a new technique for plastinating, and thereby



Fig. 2.4. *Galerie de paléontologie et d'anatomie comparée* in Paris

Sideshows represented a popular way to experience anatomy through titillation and spectacle not unlike the anatomical museums. Ostman notes that "[M]any sideshows combined [a] mixture of entertainment and seemingly scientific information. Often, such a show would have a second person inside, called a 'lecturer,' who would deliver a talk that simulated an educational classroom, with the patrons as students" (125). What the "lecturer" presented varied widely but always had a connection to medicine or science. This connection was frequently made explicit through statements from doctors or surgeons about the particular bodies on display, statements that vouched for the authenticity of the bodies in terms of "real" abnormality. One example that Ostman recounts is that of banners describing "The Unborn" or "Life Unborn" on an exhibition tent. Ostman describes what awaited the spectators inside the tent: "[T]he unborn usually consisted of fetuses preserved in jars. Often these were abnormal and malformed fetuses, such as two-headed babies and preserving, corpses, which he has assembled into the (in-)famous *Body Worlds* exhibition that still travels across the world.

conjoined twins, born prematurely or aborted, and unceremoniously called 'pickled punks' in private by the troupers" (125-126). Another example Ostman recounts is "The Hall of Science," in which a talk is presented on whether or not "Dr. Carrell & Col. Lindbergh will be able to grow human beings in bottles. 40 people from all nations. Can it penetrate the eternal mystery of life? Here is science's supreme adventure" (ibid.).

From this we see that the freak show industry drew on sentiments of wonder left over from the early modern period, but coupled it with contemporary medical and scientific discourse through endorsements from medical authorities. The now "clinical and reverent" language that Thomson notes in the sideshows seems to be a transmutation of the early modern sense of wonder into the modern wonder at the workings of the human body (10). The showmen tempted their audiences with the possibility of learning something about their own selves and bodies (as similar to or different from the performers'). Part of the temptation was also to simply gawk at difference, now represented by freaks. As Nadja Durbach notes in her book on the history of freak shows in the UK, "displays of freakery were critical sites for popular and professional debates about the meanings attached to bodily difference" (1).

We now see that *Wunderkammern*, medical exhibits, anatomy museums, and ultimately freak shows all contained elements of exhibiting, interrogating, and putting the monstrous body on display, usually in some relation to the category of the normal. Sometimes various institutions even crossed paths when it came to particular bodies; for example, Doctors William Pancoast and Harrison Allen in the Mütter Museum

conducted a detailed autopsy of the famous conjoined twins Chang and Eng upon the twins' deaths in 1874, after they had been tremendously successful in the American sideshow circuit for many years (Durbach 60). The skeleton of Charles Byrne, known as "the Irish Giant" when he performed in sideshows in England in the late eighteenth century, is still preserved and exhibited in the Hunterian Museum in London.

Moreover, Saartje Baartman was not only studied before and dissected after her death by Georges Cuvier, but *Le musée de l'homme* in Paris exhibited her remains until 1974. Thus we see that anatomy and the sideshow intersected in multiple arenas and through multiple bodies.

While dead and dissected monstrous bodies were treated as exhibits in an increasing number of medical museums, live freaks had their golden age during the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries in the sideshows across Europe and North America. Sideshows in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were largely itinerant companies attached to and exhibited alongside circuses. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these traveling shows changed into permanent exhibitions like dime museums, and into circus sideshows and amusement park midways. In England, in addition to seeing freaks exhibited in "music halls, theaters, circuses, seaside resorts, aquariums, zoos, pleasure gardens, and popular museums," it was not uncommon to see them exhibited in storefronts along the larger streets, like Joseph Merrick, known as "the Elephant Man," in London's Whitechapel Road (Durbach 5).

An important year in the establishment of the freak industry was 1841, the year P. T. Barnum opened his "American Museum" in New York. The museum had a permanent cast of human freaks on display. They were exhibited in curio halls and lecture rooms, on sideshow stages and platforms. There was a wide array of "corporeal wonders," for example, wild men of Borneo, fat ladies, giants, cannibals, midgets, tattooed men, armless and legless wonders, hermaphrodites, Fiji princes, "missing links," Siamese twins, and living skeletons. Here we see the mix of classifications characteristic of the freaks, mainly organized into the categories of "made" freaks (tattoo artists, sword swallowers) and the "born" freaks (Siamese twins, living skeletons). There was also the category of "gaffed freaks," who were "the fakes, the phonies – the armless wonder whose arms are tucked under a tight fitting shirt, the four-legged woman whose extra legs really belong to a person hidden from the audience," and so on (Bogdan 8).⁸¹ These categories were by no means watertight, however, and fraud of all kinds was key to the industry and the freaks' appeal to the audience's curiosity. Was the body on stage really a freak or was it a fraud? The tension between the *performance* of the freak and the *truth* of the freaky body was therefore part of the pleasure of the sideshow.

Early scholarship on freaks picks up on this tension, but focuses particularly on performance to challenge the idea of an essentialized freak body. According to Bogdan, "[F]reak' is not a quality that belongs to the person on display. It is

⁸¹ In the case of the category of non-Western people billed as "missing links" or "what is it," there was a racial dimension connected to the expansion of empire that was absent in the other categories of corporeal freaks.

something that we created: a perspective, a set of practices - a social construction" (xi).⁸² Following in the same vein, Thomson's concept of "narratives of enfreakment" works out the particulars of freak performance practices. She claims that "[A]n interlocking set of stylized, highly embellished narratives fashioned unusual bodies into freaks within the formalized spaces of shows, museums, fairs, and circuses" (5-7). This happened through four intertwined narrative forms: first, the oral spiel, the "lecture" by the showman or "professor," or the manager of the exhibited person. Second, the process included the often fabricated and fantastic textual accounts of the freak's life and identity, sold and distributed as small pamphlets to the audience; third, the staging, including costumes, choreography, and performance; and fourth, drawings and photographs of freaks sold at the shows and kept by people in their collections or photo albums (Thomson 7). Together, these strategies worked to make a performer into a "freak." Freak performers were thus made into celebrities, with the public keenly interested in their marriages, childbirths, deaths, and other aspects of

⁸² Bogdan's view of the figure of the freak as a social construction rather than an essential ontological category has similarities to Foucault's argument about the abnormal individual, although it should be emphasized that the freak is a particular figure that does not overlap entirely with any of Foucault's three constitutive elements of the abnormal individual, namely the human monster, the individual to be corrected, and the onanist. Still, it is possible to view both the abnormal individual and the freak as created "in correlation with a set of institutions of control and a series of mechanisms of surveillance and distribution" (Foucault, *Abnormal* 323). While for the abnormal individual, this meant being constituted within a growing field of psychopathology and criminal psychiatry, the freak was formed within a complex field that included not only scientific discourse on error, but also a powerful popular sphere of desire, disgust, and self-fashioning. The power of the sideshow freak lay in confronting the audience with their own curiosity in a sphere that sanctioned certain desires and curiosities, the display of which would have been highly inappropriate in other arenas and contexts. As such, the performance of the freak could be argued to carry out important cultural work.

their private lives. Yet the personas that the public "knew" were just that: personas, carefully crafted through the narratives Thomson outlines.

Gender was one of the features playing into the creation of the freak persona. When compared to the material on monsters from Chapter 1, we see gender mattering in another way too: all the authors I examined in the previous chapter were male, as were many (but not by any means all) of the monsters. The two novels that form the literary centerpiece of this chapter both have female freaks as their protagonists *and* female authors: Carter's leading lady in *Nights at the Circus* (1984) is the *aerialiste*, the winged woman "Sophie Fevvers," aka the "Cockney Venus," aka the "Winged Wonder," who works in London sometime in the late nineteenth century, while in *Geek Love* (1983), Dunn's "Olympia," or "Oly" for short, an albino hunchback little person who is part of a whole family of self-made freaks, works in an American circus in a non-specified time period, most probably (but never explicitly stated) during the early twentieth century.⁸³

Both novels are largely (but not only) told from the female freak's perspective. Thus, my literary examples provide another, embodied side to the history of the rise of the seemingly disinterested norm of human/monster in medicine; they also provide a female perspective on a field dominated by male agents: doctors, clergy, scientists,

⁸³ Both novels were written in the 1980s, a time marked by several important events in Europe and America; for example, third-wave feminism and the emergence of the field of disability studies, of which one important strand – initiated by Robert Bogdan's now classic 1988 study of freaks, *Freak Show. Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* – could be called "freak studies." There are probably many other novels that could lend themselves well to the discussion of the freak body, but I found these two particularly fertile ground in terms of which discourses and bodies they include, and how these overlapped or parted ways with the discourses and the bodies found in the medical texts.

freak show managers. Both Olympia (as well as other female characters in the book) and Fevvers are very much experiencing their bodies *as women*, but always intersectionally with discourses on and narratives of freakishness and normality. Thus gender is not the only – or always most obvious – category through which embodiment is experienced. Indeed, it becomes a complex category shot through with other elements of experience relating to the special body. In a way, it is a body doubly marked: it is female *and* freaky, which constitutes a double challenge to the universal, normal, male body.

Therein lies the power of Fevvers and Olympia: they provoke fascination and disgust to an extent that we may say that they are balancing on the line between extraordinary and abject, both bodily and symbolically. Most importantly, Olympia and Fevvers both *live* their monstrosity: it is an integral part of how they see the world and approach their lives. It is not merely described from the outside as a question of classification, as Ambroise Paré would see it, or a juridico-biological problem of deviation, as Foucault would write about in his lectures on abnormal individuals (2003). That does not mean that the novels do not address questions of classification, normalcy, or abnormality, but they address it from an internal viewpoint of living with difference.⁸⁴ Categories that largely function as external

⁸⁴ The question of difference, often cast as sexual difference, is an important topic in feminist literature dealing with women's bodies at large. In some ways, if we follow Simone de Beauvoir and other subsequent authors' lines of thought, women's bodies are coded as different, and so the female freak could potentially be seen as a concretized version of general female difference rather than a particular difference belonging only to the freak. There is also a long history of associating the female body with (monstrous) difference, one that deserves its own chapter.

markers for certain bodies – abnormal, freaky, different, unsuccessful, depending on what genre of text one reads – are thus taken up from the position of people embodying such difference. The reader is never allowed to be comfortable reacting with fascination or disgust, but is constantly made to see the multitude of nuances in-between by delving into the very experience of their bodies.

Fevvers and Oly negotiate external classificatory categories, such as the ones mentioned above, in their lives as performers and people. They are well aware of what they represent to non-freaks (or "norms" as Oly calls them), and their embodiment is worked out in the multiple tensions between this awareness and what their own, extraordinary bodies mean to them. Oly and Fevvers embodying such a range of positions also complicates the merely symbolic use of the body as in, for example, the opposition between the freaky body and the normal or human body, an opposition that is not only too easy but beside the point since they overlap in their mutual, intertwined constitution.

The encounter between the embodiment of the freak and the painstakingly detailed classifications of monsters under the anatomico-medical paradigm governing the portrayal of freaks in nineteenth-century medical texts opens up for new configurations of knowledge. Do these discourses mutate and change into other knowledge formations, or does embodied experience reveal the taxonomy of monsters as just that, a taxonomy and nothing more? These questions become illuminated in how the body of the winged female freak, Fevvers, challenges the disembodied ideal of the "man" in "human." *Nights at the Circus* is written

predominantly from the perspective of the young Californian reporter Jack Walser, who comes to London to write a series of interviews called "Great Humbugs of the World" – of which he's sure that the famous "winged wonder" Fevvers is one – but Fevvers is the undeniable center around which the narrative revolves. When the novel begins, Fevvers, aka the Cockney Venus, is already an internationally celebrated wonder on account of her large and colorful wings, which are the focal point of her acrobatic circus act.⁸⁵ Fevvers tells Jack that she was not born but rather *hatched* – by which extraordinary parents we do not know, since she was left on the steps of Wapping as a baby and raised by Lizzie and her fellow prostitutes in a nearby brothel.

Fevvers thus fits right into the view of wonders created by Enlightenment thinkers, a view that

corresponds to a loose category coextensive with what might in English be called the fictional or fantastic and is defined mainly in privative terms as that which is excluded by modern views of the rational, the credible, and the tasteful: the products of imagination, the inventions of folklore and fairy tales, fabulous beasts of legend, freaks of sideshows and the popular press, and, more recently, the uncanny in all its forms. (Daston and Park 15)

Fevvers's wings take her across the world, performing for all kinds of crowds under the slogan: "Is she fact or is she fiction?" (7). And in this slogan we encounter an important theme in this chapter: the question not only of the normalcy of the body, but of the *truth* of the body. As we have seen, this question was at the center of the

⁸⁵ The affinity between the names and bodies of the "Hottentot Venus" (Saartje Baartman from South Africa), the "Cockney Venus" (Sophie Fevvers from East London), and the "Black Venus" (the title character in another of Carter's short story collections, based on Charles Baudelaire's mistress Jeanne Duval from Haiti) indicates Carter's awareness of and play with the connotations between both racial and gendered aspects of these characters.

expansion of medical knowledge from Vesalius onwards. Is Fevvers's body "fact or fiction," "authentic or false?" On the most literal level, this means questioning whether her wings are actually part of her body or the result of a more ingenious technical contraption strapped to her back. For example, when the circus arrives in Russia, they encounter the following allegation: "That morning, the newspapers carry an anonymous letter which claims that Fevvers is not a woman at all but a cunningly constructed automaton made up of whalebone, india-rubber and springs" (147). These kinds of speculations are far from problematic for Fevvers or for the director of the circus company she is traveling with, the American P.T. Barnum-styled showman, Colonel Kearney. Quite on the contrary, the two favorite mottos of the Colonel are "the bigger the humbug, the better the public likes it" and "bamboozlem!" He recognizes that "the box-office tills will clang in the delicious rising tide of rumour" when the public wonders about the authenticity of the bodies they see performing (ibid.). They both know that the ambivalence of the freak body is the cornerstone of the sideshow's popularity.⁸⁶

It follows that Fevvers's body may be unusual (her wings are real), but the position of freak is one she occupies by virtue of her performance in a circus and how she portrays herself on posters and in interviews. Fevvers's "origin story" of how she was hatched, and the dramatic stories of her wings bursting out and how she learned to fly translate, configure, and dress the performing body for the audience. Her body is thus coded for a certain kind of popular consumption and scientific investigation

⁸⁶ The distinction between the "born" and the "made" freak is only one aspect of this.

during a particular time period. Into this comes Walser, the reporter who seeks *not* to be fascinated by the bodies on display, but to unravel what he sees as a scam: a normal body posing as a marvel. Just as Fevvers both performs and embodies the freak, Walser can, by extension, be considered an embodiment of that universal, human body of the white male that we encountered earlier, wielding the sword of "objective knowledge": scientific reasoning. Although not a scientist per se, Walser's approach to Fevvers bears the hallmarks of the scientific method – he wants to find the truth of her body. While he watches her performance, attempting to find a way to unmask her fraud, he uses his knowledge of normal and abnormal functions in the natural world when he speculates:

Now, the wings of the birds are nothing more than the forelegs, or, as we should say, the arms, and the skeleton of a wing does indeed show elbows, wrists and fingers, all complete. So, if this lovely lady is indeed, as her publicity alleges, a fabulous bird-woman, then she, by all the laws of evolution and human reason, ought to possess no arms at all, for it's her arms that ought to be wings! (15)

Seeking truth in the body echoes the aims of anatomy during the nineteenth century. As one doctor put it in his speech to the graduating class of the University Medical College in New York in 1860, "[T]he Scalpel is the highest power to which you can appeal...its revelations are beyond the reach of the cavils and the various opinions of men" (qtd. in Sappol, 3). This was no discipline of opining and postulating, it was the discipline in which the knife reached the innermost parts of the body and uncovered what was really there. In that action, "the dissector claimed the status of an epistemologically privileged cultural arbiter" (ibid.). In other words,

anatomy was seen as objective knowledge, and the anatomists as unmarked, unsituated truth-seekers. As we saw earlier, however, the unmarked bodies of the anatomists can be analyzed in terms of performance and staging, just as we may do with the body of the freak. Walser, however, only recognizes one objective truth, and that is the truth he is looking for in Fevvers's body.

The truth-seeking in the body that we encounter both in the nineteenth-century medical texts and Carter's novel echoes the construction of the truth of sex and the body that Foucault traces in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in his first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1998). The important moment of change takes place, argues Foucault, when the discourse on sex as the secret truth of the self spread from the ritual structure of confession to a multitude of other institutions, such as psychiatry, education, and the family (63). Medicine, in particular, began to exert a stronghold over what came to be possible to articulate as the truth of the body. He writes, "[I]t was a time when the most singular pleasures were called upon to pronounce a discourse of truth concerning themselves, a discourse which had to model itself after that which spoke, not of sin and salvation, but of bodies and life processes – the discourse of science" (64). No longer was sexual pleasure circumscribed (only) by religious imperatives; it became relevant to a number of other discourses too, mainly concerning the scientific conceptions of bodies and pleasures.

Similarly, we see a transformation in what was considered the truth of the monstrous body. During the early modern period, monstrosity was enunciated within

a framework that mainly consisted of the faith of the Church but also within popular, local, and less stratified concepts of religiosity and worship (in the case of portents); the legal system (in the case of hermaphrodites); and a proto-scientific discourse wherein commingled several elements that post-eighteenth-century classification came to be thought of as distinct (for example, monsters resulting from the maternal imagination, sea monsters, or people who pretended to be sick). A strong common element to early modern interpretation of monsters was seeing them as hybrid beings, as that which disturbs boundaries and defies classification.

When we encounter the truth of the monstrous body in the nineteenth century, however, truth is no longer found simply in the violation of boundaries. Owing to the sudden emergence of the "monstrous criminal, or the moral monster" between roughly 1765-1830, Foucault claims that bodily deviation becomes rooted in behavior: "the attribution of a monstrosity emerges that is no longer juridico-moral; a monstrosity of conduct rather than the monstrosity of nature" (*Abnormal* 73). The truth of the monster thus became connected to criminality, if not always factually, then at least potentially. Therein lies arguably some of the fear of abnormal bodies in the nineteenth century. Yet the truth of the monstrous body was more complex than that, especially when we compare the spheres of the sideshow and anatomy. Whereas we might imagine the stigma of potential criminality applying to the monstrous body in an everyday context, the sideshow freak was mined for a different kind of truth. When Walser insists on Fevvers's body being somehow false, there is an element of wanting to find out the magician's trick, so to speak, and figure out the mechanics of

her flight, as we saw in the quote above. An essential truth of the body (rigged with a contraption, as Walser sees it) is expected to be found when the body is stripped of all external trappings.

But it is not only the wings that let us consider Fevvers's body and embodiment ambivalent and not quite possible to pin down and categorize. Her monstrosity lies not only in her freakishness, but also in how she performs as a woman. Carter's descriptions make Fevvers appear a wonder, but also disgusting, as fabulous, gorgeous, hideous, deformed, amazing, beautiful, excessive, pleasurable, overwhelming. "Her face," writes Carter, "thickly coated with rouge and powder so that you can see how beautiful she is from the back row of the gallery, is wreathed in triumphant smiles; her white teeth are big and carnivorous as those of Red Riding Hood's grandmother" (18). In deft reference to her writing elsewhere on seduction and sexuality in *Red Riding Hood*, Carter portrays beauty in the exaggerated layers of make-up Fevvers's face "thickly coated" with the stuff, bringing on associations with clowns and with grotesquely exaggerated facial features, rendering Fevvers perhaps not only theatrically pretty but also somehow frightening for approaching the limits of conventional gender performance.⁸⁷ Fevvers's performance of femininity borders on the grotesque.

A similar excess marks the surroundings of the star, her body language and general demeanor. We are introduced to these characteristics during the first third of

⁸⁷ There is a certain affective affinity in Carter's description of Fevvers's made-up face with her description of the wolf in her short story "The Werewolf" in the collection *The Bloody Chamber* (1979): "It was a huge one, with red eyes and running, grizzled chops; any but a mountaineer's child would have died of fright at the sight of it" (109).

the book, which takes place in Fevvers's dressing room after her performance, and during which we are told her life story as she tells it to Walser. The language describing the scene is baroque in the images it evokes:

A hissing flute of bubbly stood beside her own elbow on the dressing-table, the still-crepitating bottle lodged negligently in the toilet jug, packed in ice that must have come from a fishmonger's for a shiny scale or two stayed trapped within the chunks. And this twice-used ice must surely be the source of the marine aroma – something fishy about the Cockney Venus – that underlay the hot, solid composite of perfume, sweat, greasepaint and raw, leaking gas that made you feel you breathed the air in Fevvers' dressing-room in lumps. (8)

With each part of the description – the fish scales, sweat mingled with perfume, the gas leaking into the room – our throats get thick and we feel slightly nauseated, just as Walser does. This excerpt also shows us the "Cockney Venus" balancing between social classes: she loves extravagance (champagne, perfume), but is not particularly precious about how this extravagance is presented (the bottle is "lodged negligently in the toilet jug"; the perfume does not mask, but is rather mixed with, sweat). She loves money, but she is not above using fishmonger's ice for her champagne or lodging in semi-squalor when she performs. This also shows in her body language: "she topped herself off with such a lavish hand that foam spilled into her pot of dry rouge, there to hiss and splutter in a bloody froth. It was impossible to imagine any gesture of hers that did not have that kind of grand, vulgar, careless generosity about it; there was enough of her to go round, and some to spare" (12). Fevvers is all of those things: grand, vulgar, careless, and generous.

I draw out these contrasting elements since they tell us something about how the embodied character of Fevvers is both divine and grotesque. Her freakery is not tied exclusively to her wings, but also to how she embodies femininity. Together, it results in an incommensurability in Walser's – and our – experience of her; she never quite "adds up," she never resolves into one of these characteristics; Fevvers remains irreducibly multifaceted.⁸⁸

Just as marvels could signify new (and troubling) times in early modern Europe, Fevvers is the wonder that ushers in a new age – a new century, no less. She is accorded special status by authorities and audiences "all across the Union," who "clamour for her arrival, which will coincide with that of the new century. For we are at the fag-end, the smouldering cigar-butt, of a nineteenth century which is just about to be ground out in the ashtray of history" (11). The wondrous existence of Fevvers somehow both sums up the nineteenth century, which is about to end, and heralds the new one. Her body partly belongs with the freaks of the older freak shows, partly to the image of the liberated woman. As Ma Nelson says, "Oh, my little one, I think you must be the pure child of the century that just now is waiting in the wings, the New Age in which no women will be bound down to the ground" (25). Fevvers becomes

⁸⁸ This incommensurability has an affective affinity with the monsters of early modern Europe, who elicited a similar concoction of often contradictory responses. Fevvers is not only a larger-than-life performer, she is more: she is a wonder, possibly a new monster. Carter writes, "[E]verywhere she went, rivers parted for her, wars were threatened, suns eclipsed, showers of frogs and footwear were reported in the press and the King of Portugal gave her a skipping rope of egg-shaped pearls, which she banked" (11). We see a number of similarities between this description and the accounts of early modern monsters: political events are invoked, astral phenomena observed, unusual happenings recorded. Although the tone is tongue-in-cheek in Carter's description – we do not encounter many instances of showers of footwear in early modern monster accounts – the passage exhibits some of the same wonder as we see in relation to wondrous, monstrous beings two hundred years earlier.

the *literal* sign that "no women will be bound down to the ground" – quite to the contrary, they will be free to fly wherever they want. This aligns with the more hopeful aspects of second-wave feminism during the time when Carter wrote her novel, with Fevvers as the "new woman" whom nothing or nobody can keep down.

However, contrary to the early modern monsters, who were rarely accorded self-awareness or choice, the "new woman" monster – in the guise of Fevvers – is not passively waiting to be examined and defined. The power relation between examiner and examined is different in this iteration: Walser, the (male) representative of objective, scientific knowledge, may attempt to wield the power of anatomical reasoning, but his attempted authority is routinely dismantled and eclipsed by Fevvers's (female) polyvalence. As Walser relinquishes his grip on objective, scientific knowledge, he begins to perceive Fevvers's wings as more real. In this novel, then, the "real" freak is not decided by objective assessment but by subjective experience and the relinquishing of norms.

Thus the question of truth concerns the contrast between the lived embodiment of the freak and the freak persona, created through the narratives of enfreakment that Thomson describes. As we will see in the analysis of Dunn's play with the external category of freak and the lived experience of being a freak, it is the embodied perspective that challenges the categories of the normal and abnormal since it rejects and subverts the external assignation of normality and abnormality according to a taxonomical viewpoint. For example, Oly is fully aware of being classified as a freak, but when she performs, this awareness (which in everyday

situations is coupled with discomfort or even shame) is trumped by the sheer pleasure of exhibiting her difference, of dazzling her audience and showing them that *real* freaks exist.

In the case of Fevvers and Oly's performances, the truth of their freaky bodies is constituted in the act of exposing the flesh. Yet this is not just any exposition – we may imagine exposure of flesh that has nothing to do with dissection or science – but one circumscribed by medical judgments on what counted as normal or abnormal. Such judgments were key to the nineteenth-century medical effort to get to know the human body in all its intricacies through dissection. However used we might be to the concept of something being "normal," Lennard Davis argues that the idea of a norm is less a condition of human nature than it is a feature of a certain kind of society. Observing that the words normal, normality, norm, average, and abnormal entered the English language as late as the nineteenth century, Davis argues that these concepts only arose with the emergence of industrialization and with the set of practices and discourses that are linked to late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century notions of nationality, race, gender, criminality, and sexual orientation (3).

Central to this development was the rise of statistics. According to Davis, Gottfried Achenwall was the first to use the term *statistik* in 1749, "in the context of compiling information about the state" (4). There was a crucial new feature of this kind of "state information": it concerned the *bodies* of the state's citizens. This did not refer to corporeal punishment or other disciplinary stratagems designed for the concrete, individual body (that had been the occupation of sovereigns and rulers for

centuries); it went further. Foucault writes, "the new nondisciplinary power is applied not to man-as-body but to the living man, to man-as-living-being; ultimately, if you like, to man-as-species" (*Society* 242). Thus, we see a "massifying" power begin to work in the management of populations. Foucault calls this kind of power "biopower" (ibid. 243).

With this kind of power directed at the bodies and lives of populations came a different body ideal. In pre-modern society, we find an ideal body that was a composite of features taken from classical gods and goddesses, and therefore impossible for anyone mortal to achieve (Davis 4). Conversely, in industrial Europe, the rise of statistics and the resulting biopower forms a different ideal. Now bodies are measured by certain standards, and given value according to certain criteria that are organized on a curve of productivity. The famous bell curve is a graph of "exponential function," or "normal distribution," in which each member of the population is expected to find a place. Davis writes, "the concept of a norm, unlike that of an ideal, implies that the majority of the population must or should somehow be part of the norm. The norm pins down that majority of the population that falls under the arch of the standard bell-shaped curve" (6). In this organization of bodies, no unattainable ideal tops the ontological ladder. Instead, it is the *l'homme moyen*, the *average* that paradoxically becomes "a kind of ideal, a position devoutly to be wished" (ibid. 5). The norm thus became the ideal.

Yet the more normative our conception of bodies become, the more interesting those who fail to the greatest extent appear. This is unavoidable, argues

Davis, because "with the concept of the norm comes the concept of deviations or extremes. When we think of bodies, in a society where a norm is operative, then people with disabilities will be thought of as deviants" (5). While Davis's concern is a history of how bodies come to be considered disabled, my focus is on how the "deviant" bodies of sideshow freaks become the tangible, indeed bodily, margins of "solid" scientific facts. As such, freakiness becomes the limit of our received knowledge.

The new organization of knowledge that took place between the early modern and the Victorian periods carved out new roles for the monster, determined by new disciplines and new institutions. In medicine, we see the monster appear as anomaly, as a part of the body that deviates from the normal, typical function. In *Le normal et le pathologique* (*The Normal and the Pathological*, 1966), Georges Canguilhem examines the organization of medical knowledge in France in the nineteenth century that made possible this view of the monstrous. As Foucault (Canguilhem's erstwhile student) writes in his introduction to the book, at the heart of the question of the specificity of life "is that of error. For at life's most basic level, the play of code and decoding leaves room for chance, which, before being disease, deficit or monstrosity, is something like perturbation in the information system, something like a 'mistake.' *In the extreme, life is what is capable of error*" (21-22; my emphasis).

This is an updated view of "Nature's caprices," which we encountered in the previous chapter, and, I argue, holds some of the same wonder of the monstrous. Instead of seeing error as the "dark side" to normality, this view puts error right at the

center of how life itself operates. If it is not capable of error, if it is all normal all the time, it is not life. Both conditions are necessary.⁸⁹ Foucault goes so far as to say that "error is at the root of what makes human thought and its history" and asks the pertinent question, "Is it that the entire theory of the subject must not be reformulated, since knowledge, rather than opening itself up to the truth of the world, is rooted in the 'errors' of life?" (22-23).

Canguilhem tracks the development of the concepts of the normal and the pathological through works by various physiologists from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries to come to this conclusion. "Normal," he finds, "is the term used by the nineteenth century to designate the scholastic prototype and the state of organic health" (237). So ingrained was this belief that these vital phenomena had become "a kind of scientifically guaranteed dogma, whose extension into the realms of philosophy and psychology appeared to be dictated by the authority biologists and physicians accorded to it" (43). The normal and the pathological did not hold equal value, however. By examining how various physicians used these terms in their research and what value they accorded them, Canguilhem finds that physicians were eager to identify the terms as part of a quest to remedy what they called the "pathological" (44).

In this understanding, any deviations from the "scholastic prototype" were regarded as abnormal insofar as they impeded functioning of the body or impinged upon life expectancy: "*Monstrosities* are very complex anomalies, very serious,

⁸⁹ Similarly, Sigmund Freud arrived at his arguments about normative psychic development by examining its pathologies.

making the performance of one or more functions impossible or difficult, or producing in the individuals so affected a defect in structure very different from that ordinarily found in their species" (Canguilhem 134; emphasis in the original). Here we glimpse the Darwinian aspect of this medical theory: survival is at the center, accompanied by as little physical impediment as possible. Medical definitions of what is normal decided what counts as an impediment, and authors of medical works attempted to ground the power over such definitions in the authority of anatomy. The language involved in describing monstrosities in the quote above is part of this attempt. These anomalies are not just anomalies, but "very serious" anomalies; there are structural "defects" that makes this life form "very different" from normal specimens; these defects make aspects of physical living "impossible or difficult." It is not hard to catch the inflection here: with defects in structure and functional impossibility, there is no question that it would be best to embody normality.⁹⁰ We should note that the high valorization of the normal function is, in this case, presented as a medical – and therefore allegedly objective – evaluation.

It is one thing to read these descriptions as more or less disembodied parts (no identified subject inhabits the texts Canguilhem treats) of a theory about the phenomena of the normal and the pathological in a biology or physiology text; it is another to consider what this actually means for people embodying a body that might somehow be considered medically monstrous. Not everyone agrees with the valuation

⁹⁰ This point is, of course, somewhat polemical: there are certainly abnormalities that make life difficult or impossible. Yet it is worth noting that the medical language of normality and abnormality extends well beyond judging such extreme instances and into wider, value-laden discourses.

of bodies with the fewest impediments over monstrous bodies. In Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love*, we encounter a different kind of schema for understanding and appreciating the body, one in which the marked, monstrous body of the freak occupies a more valued position depending on its degree of monstrosity.

The main protagonist of *Geek Love*, Olympia Binewski, is born into a family of circus workers who run the Binewski Fabulon. The book opens with a re-telling of the "origin story" of the family.⁹¹ Olympia's parents, Aloysius (Al) and Lilian (Lil) tell their children how they "dreamed them up" and that they intended to create a family of freaks on purpose so that their children could always make a living by showing themselves for money. Al and Lil's five (surviving) children were treated while in the womb with a complex concoction of pesticides, radioisotopes, and other strong chemicals and drugs ingested by Lil, and each came out with a special deformity: Arturo (Arty) was born with flippers instead of hands and feet and goes under the stage name of "Aqua Boy"; Electra and Iphigenia (Elly and Iphy) are conjoined twins who play the piano; Olympia (Oly) is an albino hunchbacked little person who largely acts as caretaker of her family; and Fortunato (Chick), the youngest, seems to have a "normal" body but possesses the power to move objects as

⁹¹ The narrative cycles between Oly's current life in Portland and her memories of her family during the years in the circus. Her current life begins after the Fabulon goes up in flames, an event we do not read about until the end of the book. Now she lives in a big house with her demented and sense-deprived mother Lil as the landlady, who does not recognize Oly and does not know that her daughter lives in the house. Oly also lives opposite *her* own daughter, Miranda, who is an art student in her early twenties who wants to do medical drawings. Miranda does not know that Oly is her mother or Lil her grandmother, as she has grown up in a convent school thinking she was an orphan. Sections of Oly's gradual involvement in her daughter's life are interspersed with sections where Oly tells us of the fate of the circus.

well as influence subjects by will (e.g. throwing meat to the tigers without touching it; or going "into people's heads" to remove sensations of pain).

The sense of having been created as something approximating works of art – freaks on purpose – is important to the identity of the children, evident through the repeated telling of this story during family gatherings. Having seen an intricately designed rose garden, Al got the idea that he could design his own children: "And I thought to myself, now *that* would be a rose garden worthy of a man's interest!" (9-10). In this arrangement, the freakish body is something extraordinary, something wonderful and rare, a "rose garden" of intended deviations. It offers up an interesting parallel to the Garden of Eden, in which Papa Al plays God. Yet contrary to the conventional Christian creation story to which we are accustomed, with Adam and Eve as the models of all subsequent human beings, the most perfect in this story is the oddest. In this particular garden, strange bodies, freaks, deviations and abnormalities are God's/Al's masterpieces.

This does not mean that the model for this unconventional garden is some Darwinian dream/nightmare of gathering all the beings discarded along the road of evolution by the fittest on their way to survival.⁹² An important feature of the Binewski rose garden is that it is not composed by *accidental* freaks – flukes of evolution, casualties of reproduction gone wrong – but rather of freaks created on

⁹² The lack of nightmarish quality to the Binewski experiments sets them apart from other narratives where the creation of special creatures has a much darker outcome, for example, in H. G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896). The horrifying experiments of Dr. Moreau, trying to make animals into humans by vivisection, evokes not only Darwinian ideas of the porous boundaries between humans and animals, but also debates about dissection and vivisection in the late nineteenth century.

purpose.⁹³ This on-purpose subversion of the "proper," "natural" course of evolution complicates the model of successful or unsuccessful living forms as outlined by the nineteenth-century medical writers we encounter in Canguilhem's inquiry. In their accounts, the measurement of success depends on the absence of the monstrous body and on the "maximum functionality" of the body. The functionality of the members of the Binewski family is measured quite differently. In this family of self-professed freaks, we see the view of successful living explored: what makes an embodied life form successful? In the material Canguilhem looks at, survival is the ultimate benchmark against which life is measured. But, he argues,

I would propose more forcefully that there is not in itself an *a priori* ontological difference between a successful living form and an unsuccessful form. Moreover, can we speak of unsuccessful living forms? What lack can be disclosed in a living form as long as the nature of its obligations as a living being has not been determined? (31)

Survival is at stake in the life of the Binewskis, but it is economic survival that is at the forefront, and economic survival is ensured by earning one's living. The possibility of the fetus or child not surviving is a risk Lil and Al take in the endeavor to create children who will be able to earn a living. Here the presence of a capitalist drive underpinning Lil and Al's entrepreneurial reproductive effort makes itself felt. They made their decision during hard times, when everybody had to find new ways out to make a living. Thus, Al "decided to breed his own freak show." As Lil puts it,

⁹³ That said, the Binewski children were results of intentional experiments, but not *controlled* experiments. Lil and Al tried different combinations of drugs and chemicals for Lil to ingest during each pregnancy, but the shape and form of the child was not clear until s/he was born.

"What greater gift could you offer your children than an inherent ability to earn a living just by being themselves?" (7). Bodily freakiness is seen as a resource, as a job-in-the-flesh: if one has a freaky body, this body guarantees your living. With this comes the valuing of *extreme* freakiness, since a freakier body yields correspondingly higher earnings. Thus, Oly perceives that she is not among the most valued freaks in her family:

My father spared no expense in these experiments... It was a disappointment when I emerged with such commonplace deformities. My albinism is the regular pink-eyed variety and my hump, though pronounced, is not remarkable in size or shape as humps go. My situation was far too humdrum to be marketable on the same scale as my brother's and sisters'... The dwarfism, which was very apparent by my third birthday, came as a pleasant surprise to the patient pair and increased my value. (8)

Oly's body does not fit well with the demands of the sideshow, and therefore falls short within a capitalist view of productivity and earnings. Instead of having her own act, she ends up acting as handywoman, caretaker, bit player, and general observer of the family, which sets her up as the ideal narrator of the family story.

Her little brother Chick also had "a close call in being born to apparent normalcy. That drab state so depressed my enterprising parents that they immediately prepared to abandon him on the doorstep of a closed service station as we passed through Green River, Wyoming, late one night" (8-9). Just when they are about to leave him, however, he shows them that he is indeed their masterwork when he moves his mother through the air, in order to reach her breast and drink from it. While his brother and sisters all have easily identifiable bodily peculiarities and showman

talents, Chick becomes the biggest freak of all, since his peculiarity is neither seen nor quite understood. Not only within the Binewski family but within the entire culture of sideshows, the "born freak" tops the business hierarchy of categories of freaks.

The way the body of the freak is portrayed in *Geek Love* may seem to point to essentializing freakiness as an inherent property of the body. Yet Dunn also acknowledges the cultural construction of the freak by letting Oly oscillate between being proud and being ashamed of her own embodiment. There is no one position that ever wins out in the book. The following episode, where Oly is lifted up on stage and stripped of her clothing during an audition at the Glass House, illustrates this ambivalence, mediated and made all the stronger by Dunn's opulent, wonderful prose:

The twisting of my hump feels good against the warm air and the sweat of my bald head runs down into my bald eyes and stings with brightness and the spirit of the waggling hump moves over the stage and catches red pants, hairy bellies, and all, while I stamp on my buttonless blouse, slide on the tangled elastic harness, and open my near-blind eyes wide so they can see that there is true pink there – the raw albino eye in the lashless sockets – and it is good. How proud I am, dancing in the air full of eyes rubbing at me uncovered, unable to look away because of what I am. Those poor hoptoads behind me are silent. I've conquered them. They thought to use and shame me but I win out by nature, because a true freak cannot be made. A true freak must be born. (20)

Oly's pleasure is connected to *not* having to hide her unusual body, in showing the fat lady and the hairy man already up on the stage that she is in fact a "real" freak, a bona fide, bodily freak, a born freak instead of a made freak. She wants them to see what she *really is*, relishing the shouts of "Christ! It's real!" (ibid.). Her body is out of its

disguise and constraints – the harness she wears around her hump, the wig, her sunglasses that she always wears because of her sensitive eyes – and can move freely, for show, to be looked at, marveled at, admired and feared in equal measure.

Yet this triumphant embodiment of her own freakiness does not last: "There wasn't any graceful way to end it... The bald man was doling out five-dollar bills like stale cookies. He handed two to me. The shame had already started icing up my valves, and those five-dollar bills were the clinchers" (20). Oly's shame arises when the performance is over, when the clothes are going back on (there are no dressing-rooms and in the sweaty, awkward hurry she ends up putting on her blouse inside out, her wig backward). When the semblance of normality has to be put back on, the pride of being a freak is lost. In this situation, it is impossible for Oly to go from being visibly different to blending in. The only way out for Oly is to hide, scuttle, sidle through the crowd and get away as fast as she can.

This unresolved attitude between pride and shame, between the essential and the constructed body of the freak pervades the novel and goes to the heart of the question of the freak as entertainer and the embodiment of a freaky body. Oly and her family know very well what "norms," as they call non-freaks, think of them, and their worst fears come true when they are shot at by the discontented Vern Bogner in a shopping mall parking lot. To Bogner and other onlookers outside of the arena of the sideshow, the Binewskis embody monstrosity and difference and therefore evoke disgust and fear. In the parts of the story that take place later in Portland, Oly is

acutely aware of how she appears to people on the street and avoids situations where children or others may make comments about her appearance.

As we have seen, the way the outside world sees freaks as abnormal and undesirable does not keep Oly from valuing her own freakiness. Her freakiness and the family history of special bodies are integral parts of her self, and something she is aching – but does not dare – to pass on to her own daughter, Miranda. It is partly the possibility of Miranda being ashamed of having such a mother that keeps Oly back – Miranda only has a small tail, a foot long or so, which hardly qualifies as "special" in Oly's book. She thinks, "[A]ll this time of not speaking I had figured her for silly, for toad-brained, because she was so near normal" (25). Contrary to her assumptions, Miranda proves to be intelligent and curious. Growing up outside of a carnival setting, she has only been exposed to the perspective of the "norms," that is, to her tail as abnormal, strange, unwelcome, and disgusting. Indeed, the nuns at her convent school told her that her tail was a punishment for her mother's sins, echoing older, moralizing views on monstrosity. The result is that she has a highly contentious and changing relationship with her tail. She works at a strip club called The Glass House, which specializes in women with bodily abnormalities (or "specialties" as they call them), a place that allows her to start appreciating her tail. When she finally manages to corner Oly for a chat, she tells Oly about working at the Glass House:

"They all hate their specialties. And I'm not sure I do anymore. That's why I wanted to talk to you. You understand living with a specialty... You must have wished a million times to be normal."

"No."

"No?"

"I've wished I had two heads. Or that I was invisible. I've wished for a fish's tail instead of legs. I've wished to be more special."

"Not normal?"

"Never."

(34-35)

Since Miranda has never lived in an environment where her freaky body was valued as extraordinary, rather than abject, her hierarchy of body value is the hegemonic one, where the most "successful" and therefore most valued body is the one without abnormal functions or parts. As Rachel Adams notes, knowing about her family history would provide Miranda with an alternative set of meanings for her tail (287). Hearing Oly espouse quite the opposite view, and in a very matter-of-fact and straightforward manner, throws her off and piques her interest because it raises a possibility of embracing one's essential bodily difference and valuing it otherwise in the social hierarchy.

Two narrative strands in the novel, the Arturian cult of amputation and Mary Lick's sponsored transformations, portray the tense interaction between discourses of bodily perfection and abnormality, and the embodiment of such discourses. For *Geek Love* is both about the born freak and the made freak, including not only self-made circus performers but also other types of bodily transformation more reminiscent of contemporary beauty regimes of plastic surgery and the malleability of the body in service of the normal. The Arturian cult is created by Arty, Oly's brother and only love (and Miranda's father), a manipulative, egotistical megalomaniac who bit by bit takes control of the Binewski circus as well as his entire family. As an alternative to the mainstream culture's incessant demands of people to be beautiful and healthy, he

poses the chance to achieve inner peace by having limb after limb surgically removed, ending up in "perfect peace" as a limbless torso. Playing on the insecurities of the modern individual bombarded with information about the beautiful body (that is portrayed as attainable), Arty offers them uniqueness instead – or, unique according to a pattern, where they gradually lose their bodies to become free of all the baggage that contemporary life puts on the body of the individual.⁹⁴ This is possible because, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Thomson writes,

allopathic, professionalized medicine consolidated its dominance, casting as pathological all departures from the standard body. Finally, the notion of progress and the ideology of improvement – always a fraught consolation against the vagaries of contingency – implemented an ascendance of this new image of a malleable, regularized body whose attainment was both an individual and national obligation. (12)

Arty taps into this very sentiment when he preys upon the insecurities of people to fit into the dominant norm by being of the right body shape and the moral obligations that they suffer under in order to become normal. Instead, he offers them something "better," cast in the quasi-therapeutic language of cults and sects, in which "purity," "isolation," and "peace" (P.I.P. for short) are key words to convince the masses to join.

And the masses do join: they line up wherever the Binewski Fabulon travels, and with the help of Chick, who makes sure that none of the amputees feels any pain

⁹⁴ The symptoms of the "Arturans" are similar to those exhibited by people suffering from Body Integrity Identity Disorder (BIID). This disorder is characterized by the desire to look different than one's actual physical form, and manifests in the wish to amputate unwanted (but often healthy) limbs (biid.org).

at any stage in their transformations, and Doctor Phyllis, the efficient and eerie physician who is Arty's partner in the endeavor, it becomes a mass movement. While Arty controls the approximate reproduction of himself in the amputation of limbs from otherwise able bodies (he has small flippers instead of arms and legs), he also wants to regulate all his female family members' reproductive abilities. When Elly and Iphy, the conjoined twins, become pregnant and Elly wants to have an abortion, Arty lobotomizes her and forces Iphy to keep the baby. He cannot control Oly's pregnancy (by mental force, Chick leads semen out of Arty's body and into Oly, in a rather spectacular version of artificial insemination) but he does force her to send Miranda away. Consequently, Arty wants to be in charge of everyone around him, either by determining their choices, as happens with his family, or by acting like cult leader to the masses who seek a way out through bodily transformation.

It is by some coincidence, then, that Mary Lick cites "the Arturans" as her inspiration for what she calls her "real work": paying to have the bodies of beautiful women disfigured so that they will begin to rely on their intellect instead of their looks. Miss Lick, a broad, strong woman, is the CEO of a large company producing portable food for airlines and institutions. Oly observes that she is "hideously lonely" since her father passed away some years earlier (154). She has money but no friends, until Oly turns up and assumes the role of confidante. Miss Lick tells Oly that she sees her transformative work as fundamentally "doing good," since she would "liberate women who are liable to be exploited by male hungers" (162).

Despite the façade of humanitarianism Miss Lick assumes for her projects, we quickly discover a sexual undercurrent to her motives. This manifests in her fierce wish to eradicate sexuality in her subjects, which she sees as tantamount to liberating them from exploitation. Miss Lick is only half-joking when she says to Oly of Jessica H, a current transformation project, that

[I]f I could think of a way to seal her asshole, I'd do it. And maybe stitch her mouth shut and feed her with a tube going in under her chin... This little broad hasn't a hair left, bald as you are. A double mastectomy. And she's still got that sex thing. If I let her walk from her room to the can, three men would climb out of the light sockets on the way and find holes in her to cram their dicks into. (338)

That "sex thing" is what drives Miss Lick to perform her transformations. There is no sign that she recognizes sex as anything else but crude, unwanted actions performed by men but (inexplicably to her, it seems) also wanted by women. According to her, it is the main obstacle to women using their intelligence and achieving a successful career, and women must therefore be "saved" from their own as well as male desire. Female desire seems inexplicable to Miss Lick, who says of herself that "[P]eople always assume I'm a lesbian. I'm not. I have no sex at all that I know of. No interest, no inclination. Never have" (156). For her, that has meant an excellent education and an illustrious career, things she sees as much better than – and, crucially, opposed to – good looks and a sex life.

Yet even if Miss Lick seeks to eradicate sexual desire in her subjects, there is a clearly voyeuristic element to her transformations. She films the entire process from the "before" to the "after," including the operation, but without the knowledge of the

person undergoing transformation. All the surveillance tapes (for that is essentially what they are) are collected in a private, hidden viewing room in her apartment. Watching reruns with Oly, Miss Lick clearly takes pleasure in the sight of actual metamorphosis, becoming excited and emotional. If this pleasure is sexual is unclear, but there is a certain element in her projects, and in how she reacts to their documentation, of finding an outlet for her desire not to be alone. Even if she does not become close friends with any of the women she transforms, she finds release in molding people to become like her.

Despite their differences in process, then, Miss Lick's transformations of women from attractive to unattractive so that they can become career women share significant similarities with Arty's messianic limb reduction scheme. Both processes have as their aim to make other people's bodies resemble the bodies of the schemes' creators: Miss Lick endeavors to create sex-less career women and Arty wants an army of followers without arms and legs. As such, we encounter two more origin stories of sorts, added to the Binewski family Rose Garden, but this time, we are reminded of Genesis 1:27: "So God created mankind in his own image." Even though it is not a question of literal birth in the cases of Miss Lick and Arty, they both advocate a form of re-birth: letting people start anew with a new body. They create their chosen ones in their own image, making them shed normality and assume the unusual body.

It becomes evident, then, that not only is desire a problem for both Miss Lick and Arty (desire for sex and relationships in Miss Lick's case and desire for the

beautiful body in Arty's), but the *body* is fundamentally the thing that has to be altered in order to cut off desire. The normal body needs modification since it turns out that normality does *not* guarantee a successful life form, despite what the anatomy textbooks or evolutionary theory might say. In Dunn's particular socio-cultural context of economic and spiritual survival, the abnormal body takes on a different value. Contrary to the view that pathological life forms harm and impede the organism (as Canguilhem found in his investigation), *Geek Love* leads us to believe that freakdom has the power to liberate us from the oppression of the norm, and to make us appreciate the corporeal multiplicity that our age-old, medicalized model of normal and abnormal bodies has repressed for so long.

We should attribute the utopian aspect of *Geek Love* to the speculative implications and possibilities of fiction. Even though the characters of Oly, Arty, and Mary Lick are fictional, we get a glimpse of what it *could* be like to value the abnormal over the normal, with both its optimistic and its darker implications. The novel systematically seeks to undo the hierarchies of bodily value that we carry with us from the nineteenth-century medical texts, if not before, and thus forces us to reevaluate the processes of normalization – mundane and structural – that permeate not just the dissections from a hundred years ago, but arguably also our current Western socio-cultural context.

A significant aspect of this upending of hierarchies is that it brings a riotous pleasure that is not quite contained, one that we recognize in both Carter and Dunn's play with the truth of the body. Their representations of gender, freakery, and science

take a leaf out of the playbook of freak shows in that they play on the scientific truth of the body in order to undo it. The authors show us how the freaky body is overdetermined by a wealth of discourses on difference, be they anatomical, social, cultural, or medical. Ultimately, however, Fevvers and Oly show us that the experience of embodying difference is not limited to these discourses (although the experience is certainly not separable from discursive limitations) but also marked by a sense of wonder, curiosity, and multivalent pleasure that challenges the stronghold of the normal.

PART II:
FILMIC FLESH AND PERMEABLE BOUNDARIES

CHAPTER 3:
The Embodied Spectator and the Uncomfortable Experience of Watching
Romance and *The Piano Teacher*

The first time I see The Piano Teacher is at the house of a friend. We are several people at her apartment that evening, all graduate students, grouped around the television set with drinks and snacks. We chat and laugh, but the atmosphere is a little tense since most of us have spent the past few weeks reading Elfriede Jelinek's book on which the film is based. As the silent opening credits roll across the screen, the room is quiet, a certain anxiety mixed with excitement floating in the atmosphere. In this gathering of tense bodies I become acutely aware of myself, of my own body, there I sit on the floor, close to the others.

The opening credits end and the film begins. We are in what feels like a darkened hallway. The entrance door opens, and Erika comes in, quickly, and shuts the door behind her. She is stopped in her tracks by Mother's voice, off-screen, talking to her as if she were a small child, voice laced with indeterminate anger, or is it friendliness? My stomach starts knotting. As they start fighting over Erika's purchase, a dress Mother finds in her purse, I recoil. The movements between the women are jerking and violent in a subdued, half-repressed way (this is no big-movement, face-punching match between men), but it doesn't mask the intense desperation and ferocity at work in their interaction. Erika pulls Mother's hair, and I

*can almost feel the pain in Mother's old scalp. Erika's cheekbones are hard, determined against her taut skin. In one and the same motion, I identify with the mother-daughter relationship playing out in front of me, and disavow any trace of this identification. I feel violated, but on a level that I cannot split into neat categories of body and mind. It is in my flesh.*⁹⁵

This chapter is born of the intensely uncomfortable film viewing experience that I had the first time I saw Michael Haneke's 2001 film *The Piano Teacher* (*La pianiste*), an experience that was dominated by a powerful discomfort whose source and delimitation I could not entirely pinpoint.⁹⁶ The cringing, the sweating, the knots in my stomach and the urge to avert my eyes even when nothing particularly violent or visually unpleasant was happening onscreen made me wonder about the relationship between bodies on the screen and the body in the seat when watching a film that had few immediately obvious sources of discomfort.

After having similar sensations while watching Catherine Breillat's film *Romance* (1999), I was led to wonder about the embodiment of the spectator – in this case, first and foremost my very own embodiment as a spectator – and what *Romance*

⁹⁵ In keeping with my argument in this chapter about the affective connection between the spectator and the film – a connection elided in most film theory, with some notable exceptions (see Sobchack 2004 in particular) – I experiment with a style of writing that puts the film theorist in conversation with her subjective experience. My own viewings are therefore an integral part of my analysis in this chapter. For the inclusion of the personal voice of the spectator, I am indebted especially to Sobchack (2004, see especially chapter 3) and Elena del Río (2008, see especially the Introduction). Consequently, I am making an argument not just about the content of film theory but also about the form in which it is written.

⁹⁶ Henceforth I will note the original title of each film but will use its English title through the body of my text.

and *The Piano Teacher* did to the reassuring distance between spectator and screen. This distance lets me be a spectator-fly on the wall during most mainstream Hollywood movies, privy to the best angles on the action in the film, always in an invisible – but powerful – position of *looking in* on the cinematic bodies from my safe seat down in the audience. How did Breillat and Haneke's films manage to get under my skin and challenge my voyeuristic privileges? What was it about the bodies of the characters in these films that made me so uncomfortable? When looking to dominant theories of spectatorship for answers to these questions, I could find only partial explanations. These two films are part of a group of European films that commonly generate contradictory and complex spectatorial experiences. Since the language of existing film theory did not provide enough tools for me to describe these experiences, I wanted to fashion a model of spectatorship that centers on affective responses but does not exclude the unconscious.⁹⁷ In this chapter, I work towards a theory of the embodied spectator by drawing on theories of affective, psychoanalytic, and phenomenological spectatorship, and an emerging reconceptualization of the connection between spectator and screen.

The larger question emerging from my encounter with these films concerns how we conceive of the *experience* of the film, and how considering an embodied, affected, affective, experiencing spectator poses a challenge to film theory built on ideas of visual mastery that contain the notion of a spectator divided into mind and

⁹⁷ Vivian Sobchack's work is clearly the most significant influence on my theory of the affective spectator, and her work provided the most thought-out, convincing perspective I could find on spectator-centered film theory. For my purposes, however, her work still left wanting an engagement with a notion of the unconscious.

body. My own cinematic experience caused me to question whether such a divide could exist at all, and made me ask: what is at stake in upholding such a divide, both between mind and body in the spectator and between the spectator and the film? What can be gained by operating outside it? And what do we need to think about in order to theorize the collapse of this divide in the context of watching film?

Both *The Piano Teacher* and *Romance* problematize issues of power, gender, and sexuality in relation to corporeal, lived bodies. Both of them have also been characterized as somehow difficult, uncomfortable, provocative, or downright disgusting to watch by audiences and the press, and their directors have been labeled provocateurs.⁹⁸ Haneke works with a carefully crafted cinematography where much of the violence is not shown explicitly, but his films nevertheless draw extremely strong (and often un-nameable) reactions from the audience.⁹⁹ Breillat deliberately uses porn actors and cinematographic conventions from the porn industry in her films, including acts of unsimulated sex, as well as paying particular attention to stylistic devices such as sets and colors.

Both directors can arguably be said to be part of what James Quandt (2004) calls the "New French Extremity," which corresponds to Tim Palmer's notion of *cinéma du corps*: auteur films coming out of France in the last ten-fifteen years that form, according to Palmer, "a cinema profoundly centered on the body, dwelling on the visceral processes of corporeal acts, from body crimes to self-mutilations, often savage behaviors derived from unchecked sexual and carnal desires" (11). Quandt

⁹⁸ See Zacharek 2004 and Rajesh 2009.

⁹⁹ See Holden 2001.

describes the direction somewhat more spectacularly as "a cinema suddenly determined to break every taboo, to wade in rivers of viscera and spumes of sperm, to fill each frame with flesh, nubile or gnarled, and subject it to all manner of penetration, mutilation, and defilement" (1). Quandt argues that over the past ten years, this direction has countered taboos by employing visceral and violent shock tactics, and includes directors like Breillat, Gaspar No , Fran ois Ozon, Bruno Dumont, Virginie Despentes, and Coralie Trinh Thi, amongst others (Quandt 1).¹⁰⁰ Breillat's and Haneke's films can thus be placed in a contemporary context but also in a longer tradition of (perhaps particularly French) art as a challenge to the status quo. Quandt finds references in films by these directors to the work of Jean-Luc Godard, Pier Paolo Pasolini, and Georges Bataille, to mention a few. Yet where Quandt sees these forerunners using "formal, philosophical and political" provocations that were "at least assimilable as emanations of an artistic movement," he claims that the "willfully transgressive" directors of the new direction replace this previous, more "noble" protest with a lack of politics and vision, which, rather than mounting a proper protest against anything, constitutes "an aggressiveness that is really a grandiose form of passivity" (5).

It is not the purpose of this chapter to evaluate whether contemporary French film is political or not, but it is worth noting that Quandt represents a segment of responses to this new direction of French – and European – film that is suspicious of what he somewhat dismissively calls shock tactics and that tends to not engage with

¹⁰⁰ This "direction" can arguably be extended to non-French directors like Lukas Moodysson (Sweden), Lars Von Trier (Denmark), and Michael Haneke (Austria).

why these films choose to take this road (beyond a somewhat generic guess that the directors want to shock in order to push boundaries). The result of such responses is that the specificities of the films and the discrepancies in their content and aim are often missed. Breillat's particular *oeuvre* as a filmmaker who explores female sexuality from a female point of view, for example, is lost on Quandt when he dismisses *Romance* as a film chronicling "a grimly narcissistic voyage into sexual oblivion by a schoolteacher who undergoes rape, sodomy, orgies, bondage, and childbirth in her pursuit of self-discovery" (2). That orgies and sodomy in fact do not appear in the film only serves to underscore Quandt's blindness to the issues Breillat explores and his incomprehension of the measures she takes to explore them. His bundling together of rape, childbirth, and bondage as nothing more than the means of the main character's self-discovery is also interesting as a symptom of his refusal to engage with the film on any level beyond the purely sensationalist.

This difficulty that Quandt, as well as many others, has in engaging with Breillat's films beyond what one may count as their sensationalism might be one of the reasons behind the fact that she is seldom considered among the "great" directors – or indeed mentioned at all – in lists and surveys of the best European films and directors, for example Robert Sklar's reference volume *A World History of Film* (2002). Noël Burch argues that these omissions have less to do with accusations of sensationalism than with the challenge that films such as Breillat's pose to the power of the "phallus" (qtd. in Gillain 202). According to Burch, people may hide behind their outrage over

explicit content, but their rage is actually about female attacks on male privilege, such as exercising violence and enjoying sexual independence (ibid.).¹⁰¹

While viewers' reactions of discomfort to Breillat's films must thus sometimes be read symptomatically in the refusal to engage with the films, such uneasy reactions are virtually paraded when it comes to Michael Haneke's films.¹⁰² Where viewers and critics oppose Breillat's discomfiting images of female sexuality, Haneke is berated *and* celebrated for the fact that his films make viewers uncomfortable. Here the issue aggravating the critics is not the attention paid to female sexuality or the explicitness of his images per se, but rather the masochistic position in which people find themselves when watching his films.¹⁰³ We are made complicit witnesses to his spectacles and interrogations of violence and moral turpitude in contemporary society. As A.O. Scott, writing in the *New York Times*, put it, "you are punished, and you are convinced that you deserve your punishment" (n.p.). Thus we see that Haneke gets more of a free pass in "torturing" his spectators than Breillat does. Considering

¹⁰¹ Breillat's form is often less straightforwardly commercially appealing than Haneke's, a difference that may also be a factor in their varying degrees of success.

¹⁰² With exceptions, of course. See, for example, film critic Ray Sawhill on *Salon*, who calls Breillat a "specialist in unease" and proceeds to give largely positive and nuanced treatment of *Romance* (n.p.). Several feminist critics and academics have written favorable about Breillat's work; see Anne Gillain's contribution to *Beyond French Feminisms: Debates on Women, Politics, and Culture in France 1981-2001* (2003).

¹⁰³ Catherine Wheatley describes two tendencies in Haneke's work: what she calls "first-generation modernism," which "refutes pleasure and places the spectator at a distance from the cinematic image, forcing them to engage rationally with the film's content," while "second-generation modernism" is aggressive and "gives rise to a feeling of active displeasure on the spectator's part, thereby emphasizing their proximity to the cinematic image" (124). I agree that Haneke pulls us in both directions, although I am less sure of the modernist labels since he clearly plays on postmodernist ideas too in the making of his films. That said, it is clear that Haneke uses Brechtian ideals. As he said in an interview, "[S]top a little bit with the emotional stuff and you'll be able to see better!" (Cieutat 142).

what amounts to a larger problem with female sexuality, and the privileging of male-centered narratives in the film industry at large, it is not farfetched to partly attribute the different treatment of these two directors to the fact that Haneke challenges a larger view of "the condition of Western man" in his films while Breillat focuses on the female experience in particular. For the purposes of this chapter, it is important to note the widespread reactions of discomfort to both directors' films and to observe that female sexuality is the discomfort-inducing point in both *Romance* and *The Piano Teacher*. This will become important when we begin to look at different models of spectatorship and what they demand in terms of corporeal involvement from the spectator.

The question of which social and cultural context spawned such cinematic manifestations of uneasiness – by explicitly violent and sexual means or not – points in several possible directions. While Quandt may think the New French Extremity films ultimately exude political passivity, Jonathan Romney ascribes their particular portrayals of modern life to "professional numbness," the "regimentation of workplace practices," and "the commodified escapism of the sexual tourism industry" (n.p.). Romney draws a line to similar developments in the literary sphere, especially to the work of authors like Marie Darrieussecq, Catherine Millet, and Michel Houellebecq, whose stark portrayals of sexuality and human relations in contemporary society have elicited similar reactions to those of the New French Extremity films. Romney also puts the New French Extremity directors in opposition to a pastoral, upmarket French cinema, embodied by such films as the *Jean de Florette* series

(1986) and *Amélie* (2001). In contrast to idyllic and nostalgic cultural portrayals, Romney notes the presence in Gaspar Noé's *Seul contre tous* (1998) of "a very real French cultural mood, with the butcher's rancorous worldview pushing the mindset of the Le Pen constituency to its intolerable extreme" (n.p.).

This short introduction to the films in a larger cultural landscape may serve to contextualize the responses of discomfort to the films of Breillat and Haneke, and to suggest some reasons behind them. But I must emphasize that I do not mean to claim that these reactions are easily determined by investigating the films' political undertones or sexual politics from a representational standpoint only. What is important is that even though we do not find images like the nine-minute single-take rape scene from *Irréversible* (dir. Gaspar Noé, 2002) or the multiple, consecutive killings and copulations from *Baise-moi* (dir. Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trinh Thi, 2000) in *The Piano Teacher* and *Romance*, they are still hard films to watch. Where, then, do we have to look, or feel, or sense, in order to get a fuller picture of this discomfort?

I begin with plot summaries of both films, even though my analysis rests less on narrative details than on affective properties in cinematography and embodied spectatorship. Yet, as I will argue, the narratives of *Romance* and *The Piano Teacher* cannot be wholly ignored. In *The Piano Teacher* we encounter the respected, bourgeois piano teacher – and, it is implied, failed concert pianist – Erika Kohut. She exercises her sadistic impulses on her pupils at the music conservatory in Vienna

(including, at one point maiming the right hand of one of her students by putting crushed glass in her coat pocket during a rehearsal for an important concert), and represses and/or expresses her masochistic desires through voyeurism and self-harm. She lives in an oppressive and sexually charged relationship with her controlling Mother until the attractive, outgoing, and confident piano student Walter Klemmer enters her life. Walter takes a sexual interest in Erika, but responds to her painstakingly articulated desires with disgust. After having repeatedly been denied his way with her because she only wants to engage in sexual activities on her own sadomasochistic premises, Walter forces himself on Erika on the floor of the hallway in her and Mother's flat.¹⁰⁴ The film ends shortly afterwards with a more than 30-second-long shot of the exterior of the Vienna Music Conservatory after we have witnessed Erika stabbing herself (albeit shallowly) in the chest with a knife while standing in the empty Conservatory lobby, and then walking out of and away from the Conservatory building.

When Paul, the boyfriend of main character Marie in *Romance*, declares that he does not want to have sex with her anymore, she seeks out sexual encounters with other men, the first one played by the internationally known porn star Rocco Siffredi. It is not until her colleague Robert introduces her to bondage, however, that we sense that Marie's desires are being met. Between her affairs with Paolo (Siffredi) and Robert and her waiting for Paul to take an interest in her, a random meeting with an anonymous man in Paul's hallway leads to something that might or might not be rape:

¹⁰⁴ I interpret this encounter as rape and not as a fulfillment of Erika's fantasies, even though Walter acts on some of the wishes she confessed to earlier.

our understanding is made ambivalent by Marie's admission of rape fantasies earlier in the film. After the man leaves, she shouts that she refuses to feel ashamed, while still crying and being visibly upset. Through all of this, Paul remains Marie's ultimate "object of desire," and when she returns one night to his apartment from Robert's house, they have extremely brief sexual intercourse that leaves her pregnant. This seems to relieve some of the tension between Marie and Paul, and Paul takes a sudden interest – entirely non-sexual – in her as the mother of his child. He accompanies her to her gynecology exam, where her voice-over tells us that she enjoys the hands of the many interns probing the insides of her body. The film ends by showing a highly pregnant Marie turning on the gas in Paul's apartment while Paul is asleep, then leaves us to see the explosion while she gives birth at the hospital with Robert by her side. The birth scene, famously, is shot head-on.

After hearing these descriptions, we might attribute at least some of the audience's discomfort to the narratives of these films. Both films give us uncompromising views of female masochistic sexuality, but leave Erika's and Marie's desires un-judged and ambiguous: it is difficult for the spectator to come down on the side of normality or perversion since this is one of the dichotomies that the films are questioning and negotiating. The summaries above also indicate that Breillat and Haneke work very differently with narrative: in *The Piano Teacher*, the story is a strong force and the sequence of events is crucial to our understanding. That does not mean that the narrative is cinematographically presented to us in any straightforward or conventional way: Haneke often throws us into a scene in the middle of it, "even

halfway through a sentence," as Catherine Wheatley remarks, and makes us leave before we see its end (117). We are prevented from ever having a sense of the story as complete, which is partly due to the lack of dramatically complete scenes but also to the blocking of the gaze of the all-knowing, all-perceiving, voyeuristic spectator.

Contrary to Haneke's story-driven film, Breillat's films often work on an almost mythological level of ideas and figures rather than with a strong narrative. As such, *Romance* is episodic and almost dream-like in its portrayals of Marie's escapades, rather than a teleological string of affairs leading up to a particular scene. There is less of a drive towards an anticipated end for the spectator, and more of a challenge to "decode" each sequence by itself. We enter the scenes at their beginnings and leave at the end, as in a more conventional dramatic style, and Breillat uses long takes and stable camera angles much of the time. However, she does not shy away from showing shocking images within her conventional dramatic structure, such as the seemingly real scene of Marie and Paolo having intercourse, and the filming of the birth at the end of the film.

Another possible explanation for my discomfort is therefore the level of explicitness in the two films. But again we cannot see this as the only reason since much mainstream film, American and not, also probes similar boundaries without eliciting the same kind of viewer reactions that we see with New French Extremity films. The question then becomes understanding what *kind* of discomfort that films induce. I could undoubtedly argue that many films make me uncomfortable, most obviously in the genres of horror and thriller, but the discomfort I experienced

watching *Romance* and *The Piano Teacher* was of a different kind. It was not the visceral shock I feel when the murderer jumps on the victim from behind with an axe/knife/chainsaw: it was not the pure, nauseating disgust at exploding brains, open wounds, or entrails being pulled from bodies, nor was it the creeping, goose-bump fear of supernatural phenomena. It was a far less easily determinable discomfort, one that quietly took hold of my entire body in the form of making me cringe, my stomach vaguely aching, an ambiguous feeling of indistinct unease pervading my body. The degree and frequency of the explicit content in these films were much less than in horror and thriller films, but I was deeply conflicted about having to sit in front of them and witness what happened. And yet again, I could not stop watching.

When I began to analyze my own feeling of discomfort, I found traces of pleasure, repulsion, fear, and other identifiable emotions, but precisely because these were only *traces* – and often confused ones at that – rather than fully formed emotions, "affect" becomes a more productive term to work with than "emotion." Affect denotes a less clear-cut, object-driven state than what cognitive film theorist Noël Carroll (1999) calls our "garden-variety emotion," which is more readily identifiable in reactions to, for example, axe-wielding murderers or sudden alien attackers. For the purposes of this investigation, then, I take affect to mean energy that has no particular object, and thus no clear cathexis, to borrow from the language of psychoanalysis. Affect is not going anywhere particular, but is rather free to move within, between, around us, in circles and in tension with other affects. The films thus produce, I argue, what Sianne Ngai calls "affective disorientation" (14).

Affective disorientation, argues Ngai, is particular to our present point in time. Ngai sees the contemporary moment as one where "a new set of feelings – ones less powerful than the classical political passions" is needed (5). She challenges the subordinate place of what she calls "ugly feelings" in writings on higher passions, such as rage and sorrow, and writes that if her book is "a bestiary of affects... it is one filled with rats and possums rather than lions, its categories of feeling generally being, well, weaker and nastier" (7). Yet even if these feelings might be small and icky, she sees them as having endured longer than the grander ones, like anger or fear, producing their own politics of suspended, noncathartic, thwarted "action." Inactivity, confusion, and other "boundary feelings" are thus affective states in their own right, but work less to incite forceful action than to diagnose situations that are "marked by blocked or thwarted action in particular" (27). "Affective disorientation" produces ambiguous affects, namely

what we might think of as a state of feeling vaguely "unsettled" or "confused," or, more precisely, a meta-feeling in which one feels confused about *what* one is feeling. This is "confusion" in the affective sense of bewilderment rather than the epistemological sense of indeterminacy. Despite its marginality to the philosophical canon of emotions, isn't this feeling of confusion *about* what one is feeling an affective state in its own right? (14)

If we add a corporeal dimension to Ngai's "meta-feeling" of bewilderment, we approach the affective state elicited by *The Piano Teacher*. As we will see, the film offers many instances of "thwarted action," and it is therefore perhaps not surprising that affective disorientation is the closest I get to a description of my spectatorial state while watching a particular scene.

The scene takes place towards the end of the film in the Vienna Music Conservatory, just before the concert marking the end of the year. When Walter confronts Erika in the bathroom after her pupil Anna has cut her hand horribly on the glass Erika put in her coat pocket, there are multiple sensations running through me, on different levels of my body: my skin tingles while my insides squirm and my legs are tense, my repulsion at Erika's action of violence is mixed with desire, longing, and many other almost-worded affects. When she walks out of the bathroom stall, I see her body by itself for only a moment before Walter takes one long stride and throws his arms around her while kissing her fiercely. Yet in this moment before the embrace Erika looks almost like a sleepwalker, or a dead man walking: her body completely rigid, her arms by her side, her gaze staring blankly ahead. Walter's embrace *looks* like violence; it *feels* like violence on *my own body* in the seat. His embrace is convulsive in how it nearly entirely envelops her thin frame, his body devouring hers. Part of me wants her to just give in, while another part of me is not at all comfortable with what is happening.

As I began analyzing the cinematography of *The Piano Teacher*, and this scene in particular, I realized that some of my discomfort came from the cinematography, namely how the film was set up, shot, and edited. A significant pleasure of seeing movies arguably lies in identifying with one or more characters in the film, letting them temporarily stand in for aspects of ourselves (Metz 57). This identification is facilitated by certain cinematic conventions – especially the shot-reverse shot pattern – that different forms of cinema follow to different degrees

(Silverman 220). Since identification thus provides us with such a large part of the movie-seeing pleasure, obstructing it may cause our experience of the film to change radically.

Throughout the first part of the bathroom scene described above, the camera stays in a medium shot with Walter's back turned to us. At other times in the film, we similarly see characters with their backs turned to the camera. For example, one entire scene consists of Erika standing fairly far away from the camera, her back to us, eating a sandwich in front of an open window while we hear the traffic going by outside. She never turns around, and the scene cuts to the next. Elsewhere we are otherwise not allowed to be part of the action, just as we are partly prohibited from taking part in the action in the bathroom scene since we *see* neither Erika and her reactions nor Walter and his (re-)actions properly for most of the scene.

This lack of camera access to the characters means that we get limited contact with their faces, body language, and other physical markers that may tell us something about them and the motives for their actions. The characters in *The Piano Teacher* are not particularly many-faceted or well explicated, and since we have little or no access to what they are thinking and the diegetic action is sparse in terms of explanations provided, we are left guessing. Instead of giving us characters whose lives and pre-histories we can imagine and which lay a foundation for our interpretation of the narrative, we are given what approximates "laundry lists of symptoms."

The shallow personalities of the characters are in part created by the way they are shot. In the case of Erika, she makes identification difficult by not accommodating our look, by not displaying traditional feminine nice-ness or smiles, and by not posing. Added to that, throughout the first half of the film she dresses in shapeless, matronly blouses, buttoned all the way up to her chin and over her wrists, and long skirts that obscure all signs of legs or feet. In short, she is not available to us as an "easy" object for our viewing pleasure. The filming of Erika generally avoids shots from her point of view, and we are at many points confronted with head-on shots of her face and upper body while she looks straight, or slightly beside, the camera. This, in addition to the lack of development of the characters' motives, stands in stark contrast to the seamless texture of most mainstream movies, where our identification is clearly directed through the shot/reverse shot structure and close-ups in key emotional moments, and through music, which elicits particular emotions in particular scenes. Conversely, the film language in *The Piano Teacher* never tells us what to think or feel about Erika's actions or reactions.¹⁰⁵ Her foreclosed desire is almost mirrored in our foreclosed identification with her.

Now, even if my identification with Erika is obstructed by the way she is filmed, it does not mean that I do not identify with the character of the piano teacher. Erika's body, as it is presented to us on the screen, is one source of the unpleasure I feel while watching the film, but it cannot break my attempt at identification

¹⁰⁵ By "film language," I mean the way the way the film is composed of different elements: the set-up of the particular shots, the framing, editing, music, and so on. In other words, film language is composed of the different "grammatical" parts that make the film legible to the viewer as a story.

completely. I feel her body's closed-ness, its numbness, her stiff jaws, and her repressed and rigid body language *in my own body*. My body in the seat is tense and goes numb at the same time as it wants to break out of these bonds, wants *Erika's* body to break out of these bonds, wants her to respond to Walter's kisses instead of holding her stiff and unresponsive body clumsily in his embrace, her mouth hard and straight. In this way, identification becomes complex, as my embodied responses are telling me several things at once: to abhor Erika's actions, to embrace the possibility of releasing her desire, of releasing my *own* desire, and to feel disgust at or agreement with Walter's advances. But above and beyond all formulated points of identification, a very strong sense of unease, an unresolved and undirected affect, fills my body during the film and afterwards. Her body on the screen resonates in my body in the seat.

The fact of a film causing bodily reactions is, of course, not a new phenomenon; it was one of the earliest features of cinema as a medium. Bodies in seats have resonated with bodies onscreen ever since the inception of cinema, although the bodily reactions of viewers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were circumscribed by different discourses of visual entertainment than they are today. When I investigate my reaction of discomfort to *The Piano Teacher*, I consider myself carrying on a tradition that began with early film theorists, such as Siegfried Kracauer, Sergej Eisenstein, H.D., and Jean Epstein, of working out the connection between the film and the sensate bodies of the viewers. This connection is nowhere more apparent than in reports of one of the earliest film screenings in

Europe. Writing about what he calls the "origin myth" of cinema, Tom Gunning both contextualizes and debunks the story of the audience at the Grand Café in Paris, who allegedly ran screaming from the seemingly all-too-real train in the Lumière brothers' *Arrival of a Train at the Station* in 1895. Gunning argues that this reaction – if it was even real – took place "at the climax of a period of intense development in visual entertainments, a tradition in which realism was valued largely for its uncanny effects" (116). Taking that into account, Gunning objects to the way that early audiences have been pegged as naïve spectators by later film theorists, claiming that the audience knew very well that what they were seeing was an optical illusion, and that this realization itself was at the root of their astonishment (118).¹⁰⁶

Vision and how it is experienced in particular contexts of visual entertainment is therefore specific to time and place, and cinema was naturally a primarily visual medium from its very inception, from its precursor photography and from the camera obscura before that. Early film is part of what Gunning calls a "cinema of attractions" that actively courts viewers' visceral reactions and in which "visual shocks" are seen as part of the attraction instead of a source of discomfort (116).¹⁰⁷ This type of visual appreciation stands in direct contrast to the dominant turn-of-the-century mode of art

¹⁰⁶ Gunning scathingly writes that "[C]ontemporary film theorists have made careers out of underestimating the basic intelligence and reality-testing abilities of the average film viewer and have no trouble treating previous audiences with similar disdain" (115). It could be argued that the subsequent devaluing of the audience's corporeal reactions *tout court* is part of this disdain.

¹⁰⁷ The cinema of attractions was emblematic for early films, which consisted mostly of one-shot films that were not edited. Later, Gunning argues, we see the non-narrative spectacle of the cinema of attractions in, for example, musical and slapstick comedy (123). We may also draw lines to earlier forms of exhibition, such as the freak show, which similarly aimed for a bodily reaction (disgust, fascination, curiosity, fear, etc.) in the audience.

appreciation as detached contemplation of beauty, a mode of contemplation that is part of the long history in Western art of valuing vision as the "most comprehensive and noblest" of the senses (Descartes, *Discourse on Method* 65). This mode of visual appreciation also became part of cinema, and increasingly so after the first giddy period of discovering the novelty and richness of the medium's ability to portray movement, especially bodies in motion.¹⁰⁸

The discomfort *The Piano Teacher* inspires is different from the "visual shocks" characterizing early cinema. This is due in part to Haneke's visual style, which does not employ the techniques associated with a cinema of attractions, and in part to his acute awareness of the particular visual entertainment economy of his own time. While he addresses that visual economy most polemically in *Funny Games* (1997), his film language and narrative style in *The Piano Teacher* inspire what film studies calls critical spectatorship rather than the uncritical watching associated with a cinema of attractions. According to Judith Mayne, film theorists have made two positions available to the spectator since 1970s: "One kind of spectatorship makes me think and reflect, while the other makes me act out and forget. One kind of spectatorship challenges cinematic conventions and attempts to create a new language of the cinema; the other perpetuates dominant cinematic and cultural practices" (3-4). While this examination clearly does not uphold this binary, it is worth noting the

¹⁰⁸ These two strands of filmmaking – let us call them cinema of attraction and intellectual cinema – have coexisted ever since, but not quite on equal footing. As Linda Williams has demonstrated in her work on "body genres" (1991), films that explicitly angle for corporeal reactions in the audience gradually came to be viewed with more and more suspicion and associated with lowly genres like pornography, melodrama, and horror.

differences with regard to vision and the body implicit in these two spectatorial positions. In the critical position, vision works from a distance to inspire thinking and reflection, and the body is seen to take no part. Conversely, in the uncritical position, we "act out" in what we assume is a bodily, non-thinking, manner (Mayne uses Arnold Schwarzenegger's films as examples, films whose main focus is the extraordinary, boundary-breaking body).

Since Haneke's films, and perhaps *The Piano Teacher* in particular because of its ties to classical music and bourgeois culture, belong to the tradition of art cinema, and so one might not expect them to elicit particularly physical reactions. However, while upholding certain narrative and stylistic conventions, Haneke simultaneously plays with the dominance of visual access that we have become accustomed to through decades of classical Hollywood film. The audience does not have unfettered access to the characters and action in *The Piano Teacher*; that may make us think, but it also makes us feel. Despite the visual recognition of a conventional style, our perception is not limited to intellectual, distanced contemplation.

The perception that *Romance* and *The Piano Teacher* invite thus belies Descartes's claim that perceiving "is not a case of seeing, touching or imagining... but it is an inspection by the mind alone" (*Meditations* 28). Where Haneke uses editing and obstructed shots to disorient the viewer, Breillat uses another element of film language, namely color, to produce affective disorientation in *Romance*. She works with entire outdoor and indoor sets, clothes, and props in a color scheme that influences what kind of spectators we become. White (and light pastels), red, and

black are used consciously, overwhelmingly, as archetypal signifiers of content, mood, and story development. The world of Marie and Paul is entirely made up of a limited palette of pastels: white, light blue, beige. Paul's apartment is completely white and every single piece of furniture is white. He dresses in white or beige (apart from when he models as a bullfighter for a fashion shoot in the opening sequence), and Marie wears white, beige, and light blue in the first two thirds of the film. Paul's car is white, and he goes to bed dressed in a white t-shirt and white shorts.

Conversely, red and black are the dominant colors in Robert's house, with shades of brown and grey mediating between them. Robert is wearing a red shirt when he takes Marie to a Russian restaurant with heavy, red velvet curtains and carpets; Paul dines in a Japanese restaurant with a beige and white interior. While Paul's second-floor apartment is airy and light, its spaciousness excluding any hint of clutter, Robert's house is color-dense with its carpets, its walls lined with bookshelves full of books, sculptures, artifacts, and antique furniture.

The narrative brings out certain properties in these colors, at the same time as the colors bring with them certain associations that the director consciously utilizes. For example, white in conjunction with Paul connotes an absence of visible skin and body fluids, an almost clinical "purity" and emotional detachment. All the white in Paul's life conjures up associations of hospitals, cleanliness, death, and nothingness. Red and black in conjunction with Robert, however, connote passion, transgression,

sex, and perceptible flesh, but also a certain stuffiness and lack of air, making his house a warm, intimate dungeon where desires are acted out, not kept under wraps.¹⁰⁹

This brings us to the affective properties of color. As Patti Bellantoni (2005) argues, we never just *see* colors on film; we *feel* them. Colors determine how we read a narrative; they can foreshadow events, they build characters, and address the spectator's larger, embodied sensorium. Bellantoni found that different colors inspired different behavior in her students in experiments with an arrangement of monochromatic, associative "color days" in her film class. On the "red day" she "became aware that there was a 'Red' behavior happening. The students compulsively gulped down salsa, talked louder, and turned the volume up on the rock music. The males in particular became sweaty and agitated." On the "blue day," on the other hand, "those loud, boisterous students from the week before stopped talking, laid back and became almost listless" (xxi-xxii, *sic.*). In an analysis of close to a hundred films, she concludes that each color operates with certain properties that translate into cinematic connotations, with blue, for example, being the "detached" color, or purple being a color that warns of the death of someone or something. She attributes characteristics to colors, but emphasizes that "this does not mean the color itself has that inherent emotional property. It means that it can elicit that physical and emotional response from the audience" (xxv).

¹⁰⁹ Black is arguably more often associated with death than white, but in this case the absence of love, passion and, by extension, *life* makes me associate Paul's realm with aseptitized, entropic death and Robert's realm with a pulsating, germinating life.

The immediate connection that I, as a spectator, make between Paul's white interiors and the lack of sex and passion in his and Marie's relationship is thus linked to associations I have (and which I would argue I share with Breillat) with "white," but does not reflect any *inherent* properties of "white." White here becomes the sign of virginal purity (the pairing with Marie's red dress in the second part of the film, after she has initiated a sadomasochistic relationship with Robert, suggests such a reading) and with a certain sense of the clinical in the way Marie and Paul physically relate to each other. Bodies are not allowed to be bodies in Paul's apartment: naked skin is something he explicitly wants neither to see nor feel, and the living, corporeal entities in his apartment become aligned with the other objects in it – lamp, bed, chair, body, table, towel. In this space, bodies are wrapped up, meant to be transcended by whatever disembodied activity Paul considers more important than sex.

The affective "baggage" of the colors utilized in *Romance* contributes to my uncomfortable viewing experience of the film by providing an overwhelmingly sensual response to the strongly colored visual image, a response akin to what Bellantoni reported in her "color days" with her students. There is one scene in particular that affected me in a way comparable to Bellantoni's descriptions, but somewhat surprisingly, since the scene in question is not based on any of the colors Bellantoni lists as having particularly strong general connotative properties. The scene, which occurs at the beginning of the film, opens with Marie and Paul sitting in a café. They are shot in medium close-up and the scene is organized by shot and

reverse shot. We see a few slow tears run down Marie's otherwise inexpressive face, and after a moment of listening to their conversation, we realize that they are talking about how he does not want to have sex with her. They get up to leave the café and the scene cuts to a medium long shot of them, from the side, walking between sand dunes and on to a beach. Their conversation is superimposed on the film during the cut between locations and so we assume continuity even though we have no visual way of knowing where the café and the beach lie in relation to each other. Over the next thirty seconds or so, the stationary camera films them from behind, walking away from us along the beach, their voices disappearing with them.

The most striking thing about this second part of the scene (I call it the second part since their conversation remains uncut between the café and the beach) is that absolutely everything in it is *beige*: the dunes, the sand, the broken fence they step over to get to the beach, their clothes, the air, the sky, the few tufts of straw. I doubt I am alone in reading "beige" as carrying with it connotations of what is "boring." Not "boredom" but "boring," as in neutral, diffuse, and without character. It feels as though there is absolutely nothing for the spectator to latch onto in this scene, which begins with a dialogue that is central to setting up the narrative of Marie's sexual frustration. All the expectation and interest built up in the café section of the scene slip away like the beige sand, trailing off like the tones of their conversation as I hear them recede into the distance, until the scene is completely quiet. I am left alone with the beige, soundless landscape.

No matter how boring I claim to find beige, it is clear that this scene does not leave me unaffected. Quite on the contrary, I feel beleaguered by all the beige, *frustrated* by it. It is as if the sheer quantity of beige closes down my senses: I cannot see anymore since there is nothing to distinguish, I cannot hear since Marie and Paul are being swallowed up by the beige image, moving further and further away. The color beige, which usually denotes neutrality, nothingness, banality, is here excessive, intrusive, and obstructive. *I am overwhelmed by beige*. The sexual frustration played out through the conversation between Marie and Paul (a conversation that takes place and fades out on the beige beach) denotes and awakens desire, but it is a complicated desire, both for Marie and for me as a spectator, one that takes circuitous paths and leaves me confused and unsettled.

Considering Ngai's link between what she calls thwarted action and affective disorientation, we realize that *Romance* is a film about sex, disgust, and heterosexual relationships that provides none of the usual points of understanding or resolution in the relation between the main characters. Marie's desire for Paul is blocked by him, both figuratively – he states clearly and unequivocally that he does not want to have anything to do with her on a bodily level – and literally, as he pushes her away when she tries to touch him. She tries repeatedly, but seems to grow gradually afraid of confronting him lest he push her away again, and virtually slinks into her affairs with other men. All through the film, Marie's demeanor connotes passivity: she looks away, rarely meets the gaze of her counterparts, fidgets with her hands and hair and speaks in a quiet, unemotional tone of voice. Her body language is careful, held back,

hesitant, and questioning, but it is nevertheless impossible to deny her agency in seeking out her encounters. She cloaks her aggressiveness in a body language that conceals her desires.

This state of affairs continues until she meets Robert, when something happens through their exploration of sadomasochism. When Robert first ties up Marie it happens caringly and slowly, yet shortly after he has finished his knots and placed a gag in Marie's mouth, she has a strong affective reaction that makes Robert untie her quickly. She falls down on the bed, crying and shaking, and Robert holds her while apologizing softly. "I thought this was what you wanted," he says, but Marie does not answer.

This scene is the first real outburst of emotion we see from anyone in a film otherwise *linguistically* marked by high passions: since a large part of *Romance* is accompanied by Marie's thoughts in voice-over, we *hear* the words she uses to describe her feelings and desires. They all signify want and lust, but the signifiers have become divorced from their signifieds. We are made to read bodies against words.

What we find in *Romance* is thus that passion, emotion, and the turmoil of desire are treated within a different register of affect from in other films guided and marked by large, pronounced, romantic feelings. The moment of Marie's breakdown after being tied up by Robert, and the aftermath of her possible rape in the hallway, are both marked by ambivalent actions and words: we perceive her crying dejectedly but professing her lack of shame in the case of the possible rape, and hear her voice-

over describe her increased happiness in her sadomasochistic relationship with Robert. Yet what is taking place at the multiple levels of the filmic representations confuses us, and ends up failing to provide a release for our desire or that of the characters in the film, but rather immersing us in the uneasiness that I have described above.

These visually and auditory ambivalent moments of tense, apathetic, frustrated, disaffected, desirous bodies reverberate in my body as a viewer, and again I find myself in a position of *sensing* Marie's body in my own. It is a sensing that is suffused through the layers of my body, sometimes coming through more strongly in my skin, sometimes in my stomach. Here the description of affect as intensity, as both Ngai and Brian Massumi call it, is apt. Massumi describes affect as "a nonconscious, never-to-be-conscious autonomic remainder... It is narratively delocalized, spreading of the generalized body surface like a lateral backwash from the function-meaning interloops that travel the vertical path between head and heart" (25). Here we see that affect cannot be pinned down to being felt in a particular body part (although Massumi writes about different kinds of sensibilities pertaining to the different layers of the body: skin, organs, muscles, and ligaments), and it does not carry with it a clear narrative of what it is or why it is there. It follows that affects are hard to put into words, a problem I repeatedly ran into when trying to find out what my discomfort was, what caused it, and why I was feeling it.

The affective disorientation and nonconscious remainders of bodily affect that coursed through me as I responded to these two films, suggest a revision of the notion

of the voyeuristic spectator. Ever since the advent of psychoanalytic film theory in the Anglo-American world in the 1970s, this has been a dominant model of spectatorship. If there is anything I do *not* feel that I have in my encounter with Erika Kohut and Marie, it is distance, and distance is what voyeurism is predicated upon. It is thus useful to take a closer look at the space that the film and the spectator share and at the processes taking place within. By shifting the emphasis from cinema's creation of the spectator as psychic subject – a task favored by much psychoanalytic film criticism – to the acts of perception that underlie this creation, it becomes possible to conceive of the spectator as affective and affected by multiple, intersecting senses.

An important moment in establishing the psychoanalytic paradigm in film studies in the Anglophone world was the publication in 1975-76 of three essays in the British journal *Screen*: a partial translation of Christian Metz's *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, Laura Mulvey's article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," and Stephen Heath's essay "Narrative Space" (de Lauretis 117). The two first texts in particular would come to shape the theoretical direction that dominated the field of film studies for several decades. Metz especially argued that voyeurism was the perceptual passion particularly privileged in the cinema. He writes that the cinematic signifier is "*perceptual* (visual and auditory)" and initially calls cinema "more perceptual" than other artistic forms, such as literature and music (42, 43). This is because cinema "mobilizes a larger number of the axes of perception" than arts that focus only on either the auditory or the visual, for example (43).

Yet the decisive point for Metz is that despite this "perceptual wealth," there remains a crucial absence at the heart of cinema. Since cinema consists of images of people and things that have been captured during a different time period to the one in which the audience consumes these images, the original referent is absent. Here we touch on the central point of Metz's thesis about cinema: due to the fact that the action, characters, and objects on film are never physically present in the moment of viewing a film, but only exist through their "shade," "phantom," or "double," previously recorded and now shown on the screen, cinema is linked above all to the imaginary. The central paradox of film, then, is both its "unaccustomed perceptual wealth" and its "unreality." This paradox leads him to conclude that,

[T]he cinema, "more perceptual" than certain arts according to the list of its sensory registers, is also "less perceptual" than others once the status of these perceptions is envisaged rather than their number of diversity; for its perceptions are all in a sense "false". Or rather, the activity of perception which it involves is real (the cinema is not a phantasy), but the perceived is not really the object, it is its shade, its phantom, its double, its *replica* in a new kind of mirror. (44-45)

Because the spectator is only seeing a replica of the object, perceptions are "false" (since they are not of the actual objects) but the act of perceiving is "real" (since we *are* in fact perceiving).¹¹⁰ The body is brought into Metz's so far rather abstract

¹¹⁰ Here we are reminded of Descartes's writings on perception in relation to the body. There are several sections in *The Imaginary Signifier* where Metz discusses the reality of perception in the cinema in ways reminiscent of Descartes's musings on dream and reality in his pursuit of the *cogito*. Descartes first of all rules out sleep as a state in which truthful ideas can be found, but then warns us to not immediately trust even our most concrete perceptions while awake: "for even though we see the sun very clearly, we must not judge thereby that its size is such as we see it" (26). Metz is on his way to his very own *cogito* (only this goes toward

ruminations when he asserts that he is not dreaming because he is actually physically affected by what he is perceiving. We are not told anything of the nature of this physical effect/affect, merely that film has an effect on his hitherto undefined "sense organs."

This admission of the existence of a perceiving person behind the gaze means that Metz does not ignore the spectator and her/his perceptions altogether; one could even say that he puts the spectator right in the middle of why cinema has the power to fascinate us. But what seems crucial is his abandonment of the *bodily* existence of this spectator, which he momentarily raises as a question when he concedes that he is physically affected by the film. Instead of pursuing what happens in this bodily moment and what significance this has for the space shared by spectator and film, he makes the spectator an integral part of the more abstract apparatus that confers significance onto the filmic images in the first place: without the spectator, the film has no access to the symbolic and therefore no interpretable meaning as such.

Because of this function of the spectator, Metz argues that s/he identifies first and foremost with her-/himself "as a pure act of perception (as wakefulness, alertness): as the condition of possibility of the perceived and hence as a kind of transcendental subject" (49). This is the primary point that has been taken up by subsequent film theorists, Mulvey in particular. Interrogating whether the female spectator had equal access to this position of "pure perception" and the gaze that goes

percipio ergo sum instead of *cogito ergo sum*) when he declares that he knows that he is the one perceiving the imaginary images.

with it became an important political intervention, as did the question of whether the larger cinematic "unconscious" is patriarchal (Kaplan 124).¹¹¹

The body became a focus in theories of spectatorship as a result of feminist scholarship on gendered experiences of cinema. The questions posed by Mulvey and others made the spectator more corporeally concrete by questioning whether the Metzian "all-perceiving," "all-powerful" spectator could be female. Mary Ann Doane, in her extensive work on the woman's film of the 1940s, argued that that there were two options open to the female spectator watching a classical Hollywood film, namely "a narcissistic identification with the female figure as spectacle and a 'transvestite' identification with the active male hero in his mastery" (19). These options resulted from the female body on the screen being both punished and sexualized, as Mulvey had observed earlier.

Although feminist film theory was challenging the gender blindness in Metz's theory and constructing viable positions for the female spectator in the encounter with the filmic text, it is not clear how much attention was paid to the actual bodily responses of this spectator. According to Sobchack, until the 1990s and with a few exceptions, there was "very little sustained work in English to be found on the carnal sensuality of the film experience and what – and how – it constitutes meaning" (56). Important advances were made in terms of carving out a space for women viewers in

¹¹¹ For an informative overview of feminist film theory from the 1970s onwards, including Mulvey's article on the male gaze, the "Stella Dallas debate" between Linda Williams and E. Ann Kaplan, and seminal pieces by Teresa de Lauretis, Mary Ann Doane, and Kaja Silverman, see Kaplan, ed. *Feminism and Film* (2004).

a cinematic apparatus that feminist film theorists saw as ideologically constituted, but the flesh in the seat remained unaddressed.¹¹²

We may attribute the lack of embodied reactions in Metz's writing partly to the way he conceives of vision as a sense separated from the other senses. Yet, perhaps paradoxically, Metz's remarks on perception are where we glimpse the physical, lived body. The decisive point takes place between the two stages in Metz's film theory: in the first stage, he knows that he is the one perceiving; in the second he becomes the "second screen" that brings the film into the symbolic. Between these two stages we find the very *act of perceiving*, which Metz admits is real. What does it matter that the things in the image are not present when they still elicit bodily reactions from us, the spectators? We *know* that the people and things are not present, yet we still react to them.¹¹³ What is important is that we exist in a shared time and space with the images even though the time/space of *watching* them is not the same as the time/space of *recording* them. Our "sense organs" record our responses, which are visceral, felt, experienced, embodied. Why bypass the actual bodily process of perception, the material that is crucial to the very existence of the viewing situation, so quickly in favor of larger, less concrete, more general system of perception? An answer seems to lie in psychoanalytic film theory's difficulty with considering embodied consciousness as a meaning-making entity. Sobchack claims that

¹¹² In the late 1980s and early 1990s, some significant work appeared in this area, chiefly Linda Williams's work on "body genres," Jonathan Crary's work on what he calls the "carnal density of vision" (150), Steven Shaviro's recognition of the visceral power of the image (1993), and the substantial contribution of Sobchack herself (1992, 2004).

¹¹³ This sentiment is similar Žižek's definition of ideology (see Žižek 1989, especially chapter 1).

[P]ositing cinematic vision as merely a mode of objective symbolic representation, and reductively abstracting – "disincarnating" – the spectator's subjective and full-bodied vision to posit it only as a "distance sense," contemporary film theory has had major difficulties in comprehending how it is possible for human bodies to be, in fact, really "touched" and "moved" by the movies. (59)

We see an undercurrent in Metz's text that addresses how the filmic imaginary relates to the physical body. He presents evidence that film is neither illusion nor dream, for example when he states that "filmic perception *is* a real perception (is really a perception); it is not reducible to an internal psychical process" (109). He makes similar statements about cinema's relation to (un-)reality several places in his book, emphasizing that yes, we *do* have real, physical sense-perceptions when we watch films. It is illuminating to note the number of times Metz feels compelled to state the physical relation between the film and the spectator. It is tempting to interpret these moments as excessive protest, marked by a not quite formulated but still persistent fear of this particular relation between film and spectator, as if Metz needs to keep the spectator from slipping away into the imaginary dream landscape of the film. Considering his repeated admonishing of the cinephile in himself, we see that the cinema is not to be trusted when it comes to keeping the bodily boundaries of the individual spectator intact and preventing unwanted corporeal responses.

The "safeguard" that protects the unstable, permeable boundaries between the body of the spectator and the film is voyeurism. Voyeurism is marked by the scopic and invocatory drives, which "are distinguished from the others in that they are more dependent on a lack... which marks them from the outset, even more than the others,

as being on the side of the imaginary" (Metz 58). With regards to the imaginary quality he attributes to the cinematic image, Metz sees this as a type of looking that fits well with the "removed objects" on film, since it derives pleasure from looking from a distance at something that does not know it is being watched. The key to voyeurism is distance between the voyeur and the object of pleasure. Metz writes, "[A]s opposed to other sexual drives, the 'perceiving drive' – combining into one the scopic drive and the invocatory drive – concretely represents the absence of its object in the distance at which it maintains it and which is part of its very definition: distance of the look, distance of listening" (59). The pleasure of the voyeur is thus reliant upon a distance being maintained. He writes, "[T]he voyeur is very careful to maintain a gulf, an empty space, between the object and the eye, the object and his own body: his look fastens the object at the right distance," and continues, "[T]o fill in this distance would threaten to overwhelm the subject, to lead him to consume the object (the object which is now too close so that he cannot see it any more), to bring him to orgasm and the pleasure of his own body, hence to the exercise of other drives, mobilizing the senses of contact and putting an end to the scopic arrangement" (60).

Here we get the threat of the collapse of bodily boundaries spelled out. Filling or collapsing the gap between voyeur and the object results in the voyeur being *overwhelmed* by her or his own body. It also results in the consummation/ consumption of the object, leading to orgasm and bodily pleasure. However, voyeuristic pleasure is expressed through retention rather than orgasm, and thus being overwhelmed by one's body (in orgasm) is not the desired goal but rather signifies

displeasure for the voyeur in this particular economy of desire. Notwithstanding the description of the processes involved in voyeurism as a kind of perception, there is also a certain threat being expressed, a threat to the distance between spectator and screen. Hearing this threat of lack of distance, I want to invoke what Steven Shaviro has called "the barely contained panic at the prospect (or is it the memory?) of being affected and moved by visual forms" (14-15). The prospect (or the memory) of letting oneself be moved by it haunts both Metz's insistence on an analytic, distanced approach to the filmic image and the voyeuristic model of cinematic spectatorship that he thus posits.

The fear of collapsed boundaries between spectator and screen speaks not only to the particular economy of desire in voyeurism but also to Metz's fear of what cinema may do to the boundaries of the spectator's body. How, then, does the particular unpleasure that Metz alludes to, the orgasmic, bodily (un-)pleasure, fit with the bodily, affective, unclear discomfort that I felt while watching *Romance* and *The Piano Teacher*? The two words – unpleasure and discomfort – are synonyms, but in this context, they signify different experiences. Discomfort cannot be said to be equivalent to the overwhelming, bodily, orgasmic pleasure that seems to result from the collapsing of the boundary between subject and object in Metz's account. The discomfort I am attempting to describe is nagging, creeping, and multifarious – it may be experienced as overwhelming, but not in the same sensory register as the overwhelming-ness of orgasmic pleasure. It quietly (but suddenly) takes hold; it does not explode or engulf the body. Like Ngai's ugly feelings in relation to the noble

passions, discomfort is the rodent to the lion of unpleasure. Since the model of discomfort troubles the body's boundaries in relation to the film while the Metzian model of unpleasure upholds the divide between subject/spectator and object/film, it means that the collapsing of the subject-object boundary in the case of my chosen films presents a scenario antithetic to Metz's.

In my theory of the embodied spectator, collapse results from a different kind of space, distance, and relationship between subject and object, between spectator and film. It cannot be based on the same preconditions as the psychoanalytic relationship between voyeur and cinematic bodies because that relationship does not account for affective, felt relations. When I *sense* Erika's body in Walter's crushing embrace *in my own body*, or when the lack of visual and emotional access to the characters in the film makes me construct uneasy identifications marked by a complex and at times internally contradictory menagerie of affects, it is a sign that the space between the bodies on the screen and my body in the seat has to be rethought.

In Metz's theory, space is always conceptualized as a distance between one thing and another (spectator and screen, for example), a distance that separates, breaks, individualizes. But could we re-think distance, not as expressing two different positions divorced by space, but as describing two things inhabiting the same space? Can the spectator and the screen be thought of as being in the same space instead of being thought of as separated by a distancing gaze? Following Metz, it is then pertinent to ask whether the films examined here do something to this voyeuristic

space "between the object and the eye," the safe distance that we are accustomed to being granted by the cinematic medium.

By focusing on the imaginary signifier and by insisting on a distant, voyeuristic gaze, Metz equates perceptual distance with the absence of the object perceived. In such a model, the spectators can be voyeurs because we will never exist in the same space as the one occupied by the people and things on screen at the time of shooting. This produces a sense of false perceptions but validates the actual experience of perceiving. But distance is different from absence. It implies a spatial organization where the audience and cinematic signifiers exist in the same space, but are separated by distance. Absence describes a temporal phenomenon where cinematic signifiers exist in a different space altogether, where they are absent from the space of the act of perception. Distance is more appropriate to the term voyeurism since in voyeurism the subject and object are co-temporal and separated by space.

Thus, the viewer and the diegetic action never meet in Metz's account, and time and space are seen as separate entities. Yet that is not what I am experiencing as an embodied spectator in the cinema. Cognitively I know that the images on the screen have been previously recorded, but that does not stop my embodied self from reacting to them. My body responds to the cinematic phenomenon in the time-space *that we share*. Thus it is not only a question of reconceptualizing the space of viewing, but of asking how we can think temporality differently.

To do this, we need to consider an embodied, spatio-temporal viewing situation in which our past experiences as spectators are present. Bergson favored the

word "duration" to describe how a spatio-temporal concept of experience is continuous and heterogeneous, rather than linear and homogeneous. Bergson's idea of memory plays a considerable role in his understanding of duration as a spatio-temporal category. He writes about the relation between memory and affective reactions: "the choice of the reaction cannot be the work of chance. This choice is likely to be inspired by past experience, and the reaction does not take place without an appeal to the memories which analogous situations may have left behind them" (65). Thus we see that even in the present situation of viewing, our reactions are layered with memories that help us interpret what we see. As Bergson puts it, memory, or "the survival of past images," "must constantly mingle with our perception of the present and may even take its place. For if they have survived it is with a view to utility; at every moment they complete our present experience, enriching it with experience already acquired" (66).

When we apply Bergson's model of duration to cinematic spectatorship, we thus get a relationship between the viewer and screen where the distance of voyeurism is impossible because space is not an abstract, external entity. As Deleuze puts it in *Bergsonism*,

if things endure, or if there is duration in things, the question of space will need to be reassessed on new foundations. For space will no longer simply be a form of exteriority, a sort of screen that denatures duration, an impurity that comes to disturb the pure, a relative that is opposed to the absolute: space itself will have to be based in things, in relations between things and between durations, to belong itself to the absolute, to have its own "purity." (49)

Here we see that space enters the very "relations between things" as well as duration itself: as we will see shortly in the discussion of memory, it becomes a heterogeneous space where different durations can overlap. We experience space not as a separate, external condition, but rather as something we share in the viewing situation.

Patricia White's "retrospectatorship" further theorizes the layering of past images we see in Bergson's account of duration in the cinema spectator. She argues that "each new textual encounter is shaped by what's already 'inside' the viewer. I call this kind of reception, which is transformed by unconscious and conscious past viewing experience, retrospectatorship" (197). Throughout our lives as spectators, we build up viewing experiences that guide our future viewings. Two points are particularly important to this model of spectatorship: first, there is an unconscious aspect to retrospectatorship, which means that we do not only consciously recognize images, narratives, or other parts of the viewing experience, but also build up an unconscious layer of experience that we draw on in the encounter with new films. Second, it ascribes to cultural products such as film the power to embody and evoke individual and communal conscious and unconscious experiences. As White remarks, "[T]he term retrospectatorship helps us theorize the fantasmatic in the cultural and the cultural in the fantasmatic" (ibid.). The individual fantasmatic image bank thus draws on not only its own, concrete experiences, but also on a larger cultural imaginary.

Thus we see that memories of past images and our perception of the present always interact, an interaction that makes the temporal aspect, or duration, of film watching not simply a matter of the time of recording versus the time of viewing, but

one of overlapping times: the times of memories intertwined with perception and the duration of the film. Bergson's idea of duration-space proves to be a better way of conceptualizing the embodied situation of watching film than Metz's conflation of distance and absence for two main reasons: first, it takes the body and its memories as foundational to the meaningful interpretation of any present perception. Second, it allows us to think about the space of watching as a durational space, as a space where we recognize and understand the responses of the embodied spectator to the diegesis in the moment of watching, even though she or he cognitively knows that the signifier was recorded in a different moment.

As we have seen from the analysis of the role of the spectator in Metz's text, a hierarchy of the senses is established in which vision is privileged and other senses pose a threat to the scopic regime. Remarking on the fiction involved in the actor pretending that the voyeur is not there and ignoring "that he lives in a kind of aquarium," Metz still reserves the role of silently watching fish for the audience who looks in on the action, not the actors:

Spectator-fish, taking in everything with their eyes, nothing with their bodies: the institution of the cinema requires a silent, motionless spectator, a *vacant* spectator...acrobatically hooked up to himself by the invisible thread of sight, a spectator who only catches up with himself at the last minute, by a paradoxical identification with his own self, a self filtered out into pure vision. (96)

While being reduced to motionless, vacant beings who can only watch silently might not do justice to actual fish, the comparison gives a visual image – eyes wide open, quiet, staring in this case at the screen – to Metz's voyeuristic spectator.

Vision is the sense that distances the voyeur from the object. If the object comes too close, the voyeur cannot see. She or he is deprived of vision, the driving sense in his/her voyeuristic pleasure organization, and other senses take its place. Collapsing the distance between the object and the eye does not mean that we go blind, but rather that we do not see in the same way. Instead of our bodies remaining vacant and fish-like, they start coming to life – they begin to take on the process of understanding that was previously relegated to the domain of the visual only, and that now is undermined by the impossibility of voyeurism. By collapsing the distance, we lose the perspective that enabled voyeurism in the first place, and gain another in its place.

Laura Marks (2000) takes issue with the narrative of vision as the privileged sense in Western history and art, especially as disembodied, perceptual agent. She claims that this type of vision disregards not only the power relations inherent in any viewing situation, but also the embodied-ness of vision. The look becomes divorced from the body and hence from our other senses. Marks argues for a different kind of vision, one that does not posit an objectifying impulse to master as a distance between the subject and the object. She wants to counteract a way of looking that she sees as wedging a space between the looker and her own body, obstructing her from using her other senses in the meeting with the film.

Working from concepts elaborated mainly by Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Marks focuses on "the ways cinema can appeal to the senses that it cannot technically represent: the senses of touch, smell, and taste"

through what she calls "haptic visuality" (129).¹¹⁴ This is a type of visuality that invokes senses other than vision, and the body and tactility, to convey issues of memory and culture in the films she looks at. As Deleuze and Guattari put it, "'haptic' is a better word than 'tactile' since it does not establish an opposition between two sense organs but rather invites the assumption that the eye itself may fulfill this nonoptical function" (543). Here we see why touch, taken from Merleau-Ponty's work, is particularly important to Marks's attempt to see vision as somehow more embodied. She analyzes images where the director "creates the new image from the memory of the sense of touch," for example, a "blurry, tactile image of the naked body of the artist's mother" in one of Mona Hatoum's films, or "the movement of a camera caressing the surface" of a photograph depicting director Shauna Beharry dressed in her mother's sari (xi).¹¹⁵

In spite of the virtues of bringing tactility into our viewing practices, haptic vision remains committed to vision as the primary sense-maker.¹¹⁶ But vision does

¹¹⁴ Distinguishing haptic from optical visuality, Marks writes that "[H]aptic visuality is distinguished from optical visuality, which sees things from enough distance to perceive them as distinct forms in deep space: in other words, how we usually conceive of vision. Optical visuality depends on a separation between the viewing subject and the object. Haptic looking tends to move over the surface of its object rather than to plunge into illusionistic depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture. It is more inclined to move than to focus, more inclined to graze than to gaze" (162).

¹¹⁵ Marks concentrates especially on works by and about diasporic people, and considers how these works seek to cinematically capture sensory memories of diasporic experiences. Techniques that create haptic images include, for example, "changes in focus, graininess (achieved differently in each medium), and effects of under- and overexposure. All of these discourage the viewer from distinguishing objects and encourage a relationship to the screen as a whole" (Marks 172).

¹¹⁶ A possible critique of Marks's idea of the haptic is that it still favors the image over, for example, sound (Grant). Films like Philippe Grandrieux's *La Vie Nouvelle* (2002) immerses the viewer in a complex sound-and-image-scape where she/he is asked to determine a range

not mean "seeing" in an isolated sense of the word. In fact, seeing does not exist by itself because vision is not something we can isolate from the other senses. As

Bergson put it,

[P]erception, in its pure state, is, then, in very truth, a part of things. And, as for affective sensation, it does not spring spontaneously from the depths of consciousness to extend itself, as it grows weaker, in space; it is one with the necessary modifications to which, in the midst of the surrounding images that influence it, the particular image that each one of us terms his body is subject. (64-65)

We experience cinema with multiple senses, which means that we use multiple senses to make sense (or, sometimes, not make sense) of what is happening on the screen.

Sometimes it is more effective to close our ears than our eyes when watching something that scares or disgusts us, and the input we receive via our multilayered perception can translate into sensations such as shaking, sexual excitation, nausea, numbness, shuddering, sweating, the urge to crawl up into or out of our seats, or it can simply stay in us as an affective and undetermined uneasiness.

When we disable the voyeuristic perspective and dethrone the illusion of vision as the primary sense-maker, we are left with something like what Sobchack (2004) calls the "cinesthetic subject" (67). Sobchack writes that she derives this word from combining "cinema" and "synaesthesia," (and, we might perhaps add, "aesthetic") and describes cinesthetic subjects as bodies that "subvert their own fixity

of audio-visual settings before starting the film. The ensuing experience is a sensory immersion very different from the relatively traditional film language of *Romance* and *The Piano Teacher*, as well as from the more experimental films Marks examines. It would be interesting to theorize the haptic in relation to such a sensory experience.

from within, commingling flesh and consciousness, reversing the human and technological sensorium, so that meaning, and where it is made, does not have a discrete origin in either spectators' bodies or cinematic representation but emerges in their conjunction" (67). Here we see clearly the contrast to Metz's spectator-fish, with their impassive bodies and receptive minds. In Sobchack's account, we find consciousness and flesh interacting, constituting meaning and experience together.

Furthermore, meaning is not located either in the image or in the body, but "emerges in their conjunction." The spectator is thus not vacant and split, but rather an embodied entity who perceives and is perceived, or, as Sobchack puts it, "the lived body as, at once, both an objective *subject* and a subjective *object*: a sentient, sensual, and sensible ensemble of materialized capacities and agency that literally and figurally makes sense of, and to, both ourselves and others" (2). The spectator's experience, then, is fundamentally rooted in an experiential state of mindful embodiment. Sobchack calls cinema a discipline "that has worked to long and hard to separate the sense and meaning of vision and specularly from a body that, *in experience*, lives vision always in cooperation and significant exchange with other sensorial means of access to the world, a body that makes meaning before it makes conscious, reflective thought" (59).

The stakes of phenomenological film theory are therefore high: by reclaiming the body as a meaning-making entity that is capable of more than just physical reflexes, it seeks to challenge what Shaviri calls "the idealist assumption that human experience is originally and fundamentally cognitive" (26-27). Shaviri, Sobchack,

Marks, Massumi and others question the place and nature of the cognitive as the only site of knowledge by bringing in the body as an entity through which sense is made and experienced, what Sobchack calls a "third term" (60).

This carnal third term challenges not only the cognitive but also the unconscious. Massumi's use of the term "nonconscious" in his description of the "bodily remainder" that is affect, and his specification that it is a remainder that will never be conscious, signals a distinction from the psychoanalytical unconscious, from which ideational content may enter the preconscious to finally become conscious.¹¹⁷ We see a similar distinction in Sobchack's *Carnal Thoughts*, where she offers "embodied consciousness" as a term to be used in the quest to abandon the epistemological binaries we see in the quote from Shaviro above. Sobchack writes, "[T]he irreducibility of embodied consciousness does not mean that body and consciousness, objectivity and subjectivity, are always synchronously entailed or equally valued in our intent or intentionality or that our body and consciousness – even at their most synchronous – are ever fully disclosed each to the other" (4).¹¹⁸ Without calling it unconscious, then, Sobchack seems to open up the way for "the body" not always knowing "consciousness" and vice versa.

¹¹⁷ Massumi explicitly acknowledges the difference: "Nonconscious is a very different concept from the Freudian unconscious (although it is doubtless not unrelated to it). The differences are that repression does not apply to nonconscious perception and that nonconscious perception may, with a certain amount of ingenuity, be argued to apply to nonorganic matter" (16).

¹¹⁸ The unconscious is not treated in a psychoanalytic sense in Sobchack's book. In fact, the word hardly shows up at all outside of quotes from other authors, and then especially in regards to Benjamin's phrase "the optical unconscious."

Although it is rooted in phenomenology, Sobchack's model of the embodied being bears similarities to what Freud in *The Ego and the Id* calls the "bodily ego," which he sees as a mental projection of the body's surface (40). This entails that the creation of the psyche depends on its container. In fact, Didier Anzieu, in his work on the "skin ego," goes so far as to reformulate Lacan's famous dictum that the unconscious is structured like language and claims instead that "the unconscious seems to me to be structured like the body" (qtd. in Prosser 66). With Anzieu and Sobchack's models of the bodily unconscious, it becomes possible to suggest a framework for spectatorship in which the unconscious is neither reduced to the body nor to a disembodied psyche.

This is not the spectator who passively lets the film be projected through him or her, but someone who takes in the film through multiple, interconnected senses. It is a spectator who exists in the sphere Merleau-Ponty called "flesh" and who is both sentient and sensible. Gone is the all-perceiving subject, the privileged fly-on-the-wall, the "great I/eye," and we are left with a spectator-subject who is radically connected to, constituting, and constituted by what she or he is seeing. It is important to emphasize that this is not an extratemporal state but one defined by both its cultural and individual context and underpinned by earlier experiences, memories, and sensations, as we saw in White's concept of retrospectatorship.

A consequence of considering such a spectator is inevitably that it becomes difficult to think of senses as separate. Sobchack writes, "[V]ision is not isolated from our other senses. Whatever its specific structure, capacities, and sensual

discriminations, vision is only one modality of my lived body's access to the world and only one means of making the world of objects and others sensible – that is, meaningful – to me" (64). If vision becomes just one modality of how we relate to the world, making a hierarchy that puts vision at the top ceases to make sense. When Metz envisages the eyes of the spectator as projecting the image onto the "second screen" of the mind, one has to read more than vision into this act of projection.

Like Jennifer Barker's employment of touch as not only as a thing that happens at the surface of the skin, but as a general "manner of being" in the meeting between spectator and film, we need to reconceptualize the space and the system that we inscribe ourselves in, and are inscribed by, as spectators. Barker finds that her exploration of cinema's tactility "opens up the possibility of cinema as an *intimate* experience and of our relationship with cinema as a *close* connection, rather than as a distant experience of observation, which the notion of cinema as a purely visual medium presumes" (2). Now that we have seen that vision never operates in isolation from the other senses, it is perhaps possible to dispense with the idea of a pure vision and focus instead on the connection Barker emphasizes between film and spectator.

If we read *Romance* and *The Piano Teacher* through a situation that intimately situates the spectator and the film, we find that it is not a question of a wholesale collapse of the space between the seat and the screen, but rather a proximity that lets us as embodied spectators see and feel differently from the voyeuristic spectator. What we have seen is that the threatening collapse between spectator and screen is not so much a collapse as a closer connection, one in which the voyeuristic gaze does

not enjoy enough space and distance to nourish its particular pleasures. Much of the imagery in the films in this chapter does not strictly qualify as "haptic" as Marks describes it. Yet there are moments like the "beige frustration" scene in *Romance* that clearly play on an embodied vision that includes both sensory reactions in the moment (the color overwhelms me as I am watching; it momentarily eclipses both sound and narrative) and cultural associations embedded in my retrospectatorship (beige is a boring color).

In another way, the discomfort I feel in the scene where Erika and Mother lie side by side in their beds with the light off, and Erika suddenly rolls on top of Mother and starts kissing her while Mother tries to fight her off, arguably plays on a not entirely conscious revulsion at the thought of the subjectivity-eradicating consumption of the child by the mother (here rendered in the version of the child wanting to be one with the mother) and a kind of revival of the primal scene. At the same time, the darkness in the room makes it hard to see exactly what is happening: we can only try to make out two bodies in the tangled heap on the bed. Like in the very first scene described in this chapter, the diegetic sound plays a considerable role: the scene is made intense by the noises of physical struggle mixed in with whimpers, cries, and Mother's clipped, angry scolding sounds. In both this and the opening scene of *The Piano Teacher*, there are narrative *and* haptic elements that give rise to my discomfort, on several levels of body and consciousness.

In my theory of the embodied spectator, then, we cannot operate with binaries between body and mind, narrative and form, embodiment and the unconscious.

Instead we arrive at a spectator whose affective disorientation and discomfort are crystallized in the meeting between haptic connections and screen bodies; complex and gendered identification with two masochistic but still strangely active female "heroes;" and a lack of visual mastery of the image, all framed by earlier spectatorial and other experiences, both conscious and unconscious.¹¹⁹ In the Bergsonian cinematic time-space, meaning is filtered and understood through the body. As Brian Massumi writes, "the skin is faster than the word" (25).

¹¹⁹ In this particular composition of the spectator, I am obviously betraying my own, personal starting point as a female spectator with a particular history of retrospectatorship. The generalizable point lies in the combination of an affective connection and not-entirely-conscious identifications with the elements of the films. It should also be noted that our embodied reactions change with each viewing, as the concept of retrospectatorship should make clear.

CHAPTER 4: Merging With Flesh

Pure touch gives access to information, a soft correlate of what was once called the intellect
– Michel Serres, *The Five Senses*

The previous chapter centered on un-knotting – or "making sense" of – the complicated, many-faceted reactions of the embodied spectator to films that cause what Sianne Ngai calls "affective disorientation." While that chapter focused on the unclear, uncomfortable patterns of affect and challenges to vision as a pure, domineering sense generated by Catherine Breillat's film *Romance* and Michael Haneke's film *The Piano Teacher*, I now want to consider the affective and theoretical indeterminacy arising from moving underneath the skin and into cinematic flesh. The present chapter picks up on the bodily sensations that were at the heart of Chapter 3 and takes them further: here we deal with the properties, meanings, and experiences of skin and flesh as they matter for non-Cartesian embodiment.

The cinematic centerpiece in this chapter is another French film from the same period, Marina de Van's 2001 feature debut *In My Skin* (*Dans ma peau*). The film portrays Esther (played by de Van), a rising star in an international marketing company, who, after an accident where her right leg is slashed, becomes the agent of cannibalistic curiosity directed toward her own body. She embarks on a path to cut open and explore her flesh, actions that are met with worry and jealousy by her

boyfriend, Vincent, and friend, Sandrine, and that increasingly set her apart from her colleagues as her two worlds – the everyday world and the world of bodily exploration – strain to coexist.

There is nothing simple or easily identifiable about Esther's motives for cutting her skin and flesh; contrary to several other cinematic portrayals of cutting, neither Esther nor the film give us any firm reasons for why she goes down that particular path. That does not mean that there have been no attempts to explain it. In her treatment of the film, Carrie Tarr (2006) focuses on Esther's actions as bodily responses to social pressures, while Tim Palmer (2011) argues that the film traces "Esther's plight to the personal costs of careerism and late-phase capitalism," as well as the accompanying "stunted psychological growth of young women inhabiting brutalist architecture" (Palmer 84, 85). Certain aspects of how Esther goes about entering her own body do call to mind the type of self-harm known as "cutting," especially in the perceived release of pressure through the breaking of the skin. The "brutalist architecture" that Esther inhabits is one of many surfaces with which the film is occupied, and provides both a contrast to and a trigger for Esther's cutting. As will become clear, however, Esther's invasive bodily practices exceed the conventional definition of self-harm. The way the film portrays her practices rather signals a play with different models of embodied, non-Cartesian subjectivity.

In My Skin resists a coherent, finite interpretation. The subjectivities of the characters involved are sparingly developed, we get little information about their lives, and their motives are not always clear. The narrative clearly centers on Esther

and her process of bodily exploration – there are no parts of the film that do not involve her – and consequently the viewers develop a bond with Esther even as the film is frustrating in its lack of answers. At the same time, this bond provides a more intimate access to Esther than any of the characters in the film: we as viewers are privy to the cutting episodes that she will not show to anyone else. Esther draws us in, even looking directly into the camera during some of the cutting episodes. Still, we do not have unmediated access: sometimes the camera does not show us the actual cutting; at other times, the film cuts up the image in split screen so that we lose our privileged, omniscient point of view.

The result is that we as viewers become implicated in Esther's sometimes gruesome investigations more intimately than we perhaps are used to in other genres that deal with cut-up bodies. Without showing us every incision and gash, the film challenges us to look our flesh in the eye. We are challenged not simply to objectify the explicit images on the screen, but to think beyond the immediate horror of our insides and into what that might tell us about how we embody materiality. As the title suggests, the film asks us what it means to be in one's skin. Embodiment is therefore primary to of how I read our access to Esther's actions and the larger issues in the film. The film echoes Elizabeth Grosz's call to develop a new critical vocabulary of embodiment: "Although within our intellectual heritage there is no language in which to describe such concepts [of mind and body], no terminology that does not succumb to versions of this polarization, some kind of understanding of *embodied subjectivity*, of *psychical corporeality*, needs to be developed" (21-22).

With such an understanding of embodiment in mind, I make skin the organizing principle for both my reading of the film and for this chapter as a whole. In a series of steps mirroring Esther's gradual journey through her skin and into her flesh, the chapter is constructed in layers. First we encounter skin as surface in the widespread critical inability to probe deeper when it comes to the bodies in *In My Skin* and in the way the Cartesian split prevents any engagement with embodied subjectivity. When the film's own preoccupation with breaking through surfaces becomes clear, we go beyond the skin as surface and consider it as perceptual organ.

How does this film help us think through what it means to inhabit one's skin, to be (un)comfortable in one's skin, and to understand the skin as a defining feature of subjectivity? And what happens to the mind/body split in Esther's working through of her detachment from and reattachment to her body? A second set of questions concerns how we treat the question of meaning behind Esther's actions. What does it signify that language, as a vehicle for meaning, repeatedly fails Esther when she tries to describe what is happening to her? At times it is tempting to diagnose her with a recognizable disorder that makes her treat her body in the way she does in order to make her understandable, especially since her actions have much in common with cutting. Yet ultimately Esther's trajectory eschews any clear psychiatric diagnosis, challenging us to open up our interpretive framework to consider the larger implications of her actions for non-Cartesian embodiment and corporeal communication.

The larger questions in this investigation revolve around how we think subjectivity in relation to our material embodiment, and especially in relation to our skin. Skin is circumscribed by a wealth of symbolic, metaphorical, cultural, tactile, medical, scientific, and embodied meaning, but the flesh underneath seems to enjoy (or suffer) less of a burden of meaning. Skin may be the most readily visible and interpretable element in Esther's bodily explorations, yet the flesh underneath also plays a significant role in understanding the implications of her actions and, in a phenomenological sense, in understanding how Esther is not a discrete individual separated from her larger material world.

We encounter skin first in the very title of the film. *In My Skin* invokes a myriad of idioms concerning our dermatological envelope. The French title, *Dans ma peau*, plays on the French idiom *être bien/mal dans sa peau*: "to feel/not to feel good about oneself" (Harrap 357). The French idiom goes beyond the English "to be in one's skin," denoting "unclothed, naked," and extends it to being (un-)comfortable in one's own skin, to be oneself. Here skin stands in for the entire body: I am (un-) comfortable about who I am and consequently about what I project to the outside world. Skin thus becomes the defining feature of the person as a whole on a material level – I am *in my skin*, I am whole, my skin envelops me and makes me a person with a self, an identity. As Claudia Benthien remarks, "[S]peech about one's own skin is speech about oneself as body" (9). Skin is a synecdoche for the embodied self.

Integrated in the overarching, structural skin themes, there are three particular motifs in *In My Skin* that I pursue: the first is that there is no clear language or critical

vocabulary available to either Esther or the viewer in the quest to "make sense" of what is happening on the screen. This lack results, I argue, from the fact that the film challenges our main conceptual frame for understanding bodies, namely the Cartesian splitting of the subject into body and mind. As Grosz's argues (and as we saw in the previous chapter), we have no ready language to describe an embodied subjectivity that does not adhere to the mind/body split. This brings us to the second theme, namely the detachment that Esther feels from her materiality. The accident in the garden can be understood as the trigger, the moment when her Cartesian existence becomes acutely visible to her. To remedy this split, Esther begins to cut into her body, which introduces the third and final theme: the preoccupation with skin and flesh. This preoccupation exists both as a larger logic in the film's focus on various non-corporeal surfaces and in the gradual opening of Esther's bodily surfaces. The apparent paradox – which, as we will see when we look at it through the lens of corporeal phenomenology, is not such a paradox after all – is that Esther has to cut her body in order to reconnect her flesh to the flesh of the world.

At the beginning of the film, Esther and her college friend and colleague, Sandrine, go to a party hosted by a friend of their boss. Right after arriving, Esther goes outside to explore the dark garden, stumbles and cuts her leg on some tools left there. Despite the fall and the sound of ripping fabric, she does not realize that she is injured, and understands it only when she sees her own bloody footprints later in the evening. After overcoming the initial shock at the gash on her leg, she goes out to have a drink with Sandrine and some other friends. Later that night she goes to the

doctor, telling him when he wonders why she waited so long to come that "it did not hurt." She refuses his suggestion of a skin graft since it is not medically necessary but would only be for cosmetic purposes, and goes home.

The next morning, she tends to her wound, which gives us our first explicit image. In an extreme close-up, we see her pull off the bandage to reveal a bloody, yellow, oozing gash. The gauze sticks to the skin, pulling it away, the vivid details of pus and blood and yellow and blue and green threatening nausea in the viewer. Her boyfriend, Vincent, comes home to discover Esther matter-of-factly putting on a new bandage. He reacts with horror but is soon less worried about her injury than about her not feeling the sensation and pain of the cut. He interprets it as an inability to feel *his* touch too, betraying a note of jealousy that will appear again later in the film.

We learn that Esther is newly hired in an international marketing firm in which she is rising quickly, somewhat to the chagrin of Sandrine, who got Esther the job and has worked longer in the company. Esther is soon promoted to project manager, which exacerbates Sandrine's envy and drives a wedge between the two women. The first episode of cutting takes place at the office. Esther excitedly tells Sandrine about it, but Sandrine reacts with worry. Esther then hides her wounds from her colleagues and Vincent, but as she begins making more serious cuts she finds it harder to cover them up. After a business dinner during which she suddenly perceives her arm as being separated from her body, Esther seeks refuge in a hotel room and embarks on her first serious cutting episode. To cover up her cuts, she fakes a car

crash, which Vincent seems to only partly believe is the source of the many markings on her body. He makes her promise she will stop hurting herself.

Meanwhile, Esther and Vincent are hunting for an apartment to move into together. Yet increasingly Esther barely manages to keep up appearances with Vincent, and their relationship begins to deteriorate as her behavior becomes more erratic and she is less able to hide her bodily explorations. Her professional life is in jeopardy after she behaves strangely at the business dinner. It soon becomes clear that the pull of the cutting is a stronger force in Esther than her will to comply with office regulations and socially acceptable behavior, and she proceeds to engage in ever more serious carving episodes. The most extensive one ends the film. We see her purchase a camera, knives, and various other effects in the supermarket before she goes to a hotel room and begins a particularly long session of body exploration, shown in split screen. Back to full-screen, the film ends with a thrice-repeated shot of Esther lying on her side on the hotel bed, looking straight and unblinking into the camera while the camera rotates and pulls away.

I: SKIN AS SURFACE

In My Skin springs from the same national film context as the films examined in Chapter 3. Especially the violence in *In My Skin* (if not quite its character or narrative function) puts the film in relation to other films in the category of "New French Extremity," as James Quandt calls it, or *cinéma du corps* in Tim Palmer's iteration. The notoriety of films such as *Romance* (dir. Catherine Breillat, 1999),

Trouble Every Day (dir. Claire Denis, 2002), *Irréversible* (dir. Gaspar Noé, 2002), and *Twentynine Palms* (dir. Bruno Dumont, 2003) has prevented many critics from looking closely at why such tactics are employed in these films and what they accomplish, or to see beyond the initial, instinctive horror at what they witness on the screen.¹²⁰ They take these films' breaking of bodily boundaries at the level of surface and often decline to dig deeper.

Palmer, for example, puts *cinéma du corps* films in the context of constituting a new French wave of films, though more loosely connected through commonalities in technique and content than the New Wave in the 1950s and 60s. He claims that, "[O]n first viewing – or at a glance – these motifs of physical and/or sexual debasement are undeniably challenging. They are categorically not, however, the sole basis, or only interest, of this mode of cinema. Our entry point must be the analysis of the *cinéma du corps* as a type of avant-garde phenomenon" (60). Here it seems like Palmer tries to appease the scandalized viewers who are quick to dismiss *cinéma du corps* films on the grounds that they are simply too hard to stomach, arguing that we look at them instead as challenging the limits of artistic expression as we know and accept it.¹²¹ *Cinéma du corps* undoubtedly does push the limits of what we think we can take in as viewers. Yet there is also a sense in Palmer's exhortation that we look *beyond* the gore and instead focus on how the films might be part of a larger aesthetic

¹²⁰ Moreover, there is a dearth of publications about it. Tim Palmer's *Brutal Intimacy* (2011) and Tanya Horeck and Tina Kendall's edited collection *The New Extremism in Cinema: From France to Europe* (2011) are the only two volumes I have seen so far that deal particularly with this new direction of French and European films.

¹²¹ In *In My Skin* we do catch a citation of an earlier avant-garde cinema, surrealism, in the dinner scene where Esther sees her arm detached from her body.

and thematic direction; in other words, pass over exactly what makes the most forceful, bodily impression on us.

Linda Williams (1991), on the other hand, makes a compelling case for confronting our discomfort in the encounter with explicit material, interrogating why the films use such strategies and what work they might be doing. Writing about censorship debates regarding what should and should not be allowed to be shown on film, Williams argues, "[B]ecause so much attention goes to determining where to draw the line, discussions of the gross are often a highly confused hodgepodge of different categories of excess" ("Film Bodies" 2). The excess she refers to may consist of what is actually shown on the screen, whether sexual, violent, or just simply "too emotional;" or it can manifest in the reactions the films awaken in the viewer, both in body and mind. Williams observes that when the doses of violence and/or sex become overwhelming, it is difficult for viewers to accept that the images are there for a reason other than merely to shock or excite.

In themselves, these sensations are regarded with suspicion, resulting in the low status of genres that peddle what Williams calls "sensationalist wares." She analyzes three film genres she calls "body genres" on account of their focus on exhibiting excessive emotion and eliciting excessive sensations in the viewers (qualities that make them not quite trustworthy in people's eyes, Williams argues) – pornography, horror, and melodrama. Williams wants to "get beyond the mere fact of sensation to explore its system and structure as well as its effect on the bodies of spectators" ("Film Bodies" 3). We may thus observe the difference between Palmer's

approach and that of Williams: the former wants to shift focus away from the difficult images (in terms of discomfort or titillation) and onto the aesthetic change that these films represent; the latter wants to see what kind of cultural work the difficult images do. While there is certainly merit in analyzing *In My Skin* as part of a new avant-garde, I maintain that Williams's approach is the more productive since it points to the excessive, problematic, not-quite-contained body as the central principle of the film genres she writes about.

I bring out these two ways of approaching *cinéma du corps* – Palmer's avant-garde phenomenon and Williams's "body genre" – since it is not my sole purpose to linger on the images in *In My Skin* that can be described as uncomfortable, yet it is nevertheless an important part of my analysis to not dismiss them as simply – if not even simplistically – excessive. Rather, I try to find out what these images produce in the context of the film and, to a lesser extent than in the previous chapter, in the viewer. In order to do that, it is necessary as a viewer to overcome the initial bodily rejection of and disgust at the images of Esther cutting into her own body, and keep watching. In other words, to be able to use language to say something meaningful about something that seems so violently wrenched away from language, we must curb the urge to look away, *walk* away, turn off the film, or otherwise not engage with what we are shown. I do not want to get rid of the discomfort, only our first instinctual inability to engage with the film at all.

Part of this inability to engage with the film may stem from the lack of a critical vocabulary in the film with which to make sense of its narrative. In two

scenes, Esther is asked direct questions about her relationship to her body, which point to the central problems involved in trying to make sense of her actions. The first scene occurs in the beginning of the film, when Esther has finally gone to the hospital to get her wound treated after her accident; the second occurs mid-way in the film, at home with Vincent. In the hospital scene, the doctor is surprised that Esther did not feel pain or discomfort earlier, and that she waited so long to come in to get the wound treated. He jokingly asks Esther, "are you sure it is your leg?" Esther gives him a puzzled look but does not reply. In the second scene, Vincent is exasperated at Esther's seeming inability to give up her invasive body adventures, and asks her, "don't you like your body?" This time Esther responds, "yes I do, but..." and trails off without getting Vincent or us any closer to a clear answer. He presses her further, only to bring her to tears as she asks him to stop questioning her.

In both of these scenes, Esther lacks the words to describe or convey what is happening to her. At the doctor's office she does not speak at all, and, faced with Vincent's more intense demand for an answer, she attempts one, but trails off without getting anywhere. The insufficiency of language in these scenes and others is a prominent theme of the film. Through Esther's unsuccessful attempts to articulate what is happening in her, it becomes clear that conventional language cannot describe what she feels.¹²² The limits of language are closely related to an alleged absence of

¹²² I argue that this is less the absence – or even destruction – of language that Elaine Scarry posits as the effects of extreme pain than a lack of language, because what is happening has no ready vocabulary. Crucial to this interpretation is that Esther does not *feel* the wound, she *sees* it – and even then, she does not think it is worth going to the doctor right away. It is thus less a question of an intensification of sensation leading to loss of language, as in Scarry's

thinking: Esther's defensive response to the questions from Vincent, Sandrine, and the doctor is invariably that she "wasn't thinking" or that a "mindless urge" came over her. After observing the urgency with which she burrows into her skin and flesh, this mindless urge certainly seems to be corporeal rather than cerebral. In these intense moments, she is overcome by a power that cannot be reigned in by language or reason.

I argue that there is a particularly Cartesian problem behind the inability to use language to define what Esther goes through: the disjunctive relation between a rational, thinking mind and a material, feeling body. In Esther's urges the disavowed body forces itself to the surface, collapsing the gap that allows the Cartesian split to operate in the first place. A new knowledge is made available to Esther when she gives up language and thought in the episodes of bodily exploration: an embodied knowledge that does not treat the body as an object like any other, but as what Grosz calls a "thing and a nonthing, an object, but an object which somehow contains or coexists with an interiority, an object able to take itself and others as subjects, a unique kind of object not reducible to other objects" (xi). The relation between "me" (self, mind) and "my body" (unthinking materiality) is reconceptualized and questioned in Esther's incursions. Reading *In My Skin* as a film about embodiment entails looking at the conditions of possibility that enable me to write that the film concerns "the relationship between Esther and her body," the splitting self from flesh.

account, than of the loss of language because of detachment from (and an emerging, embodied, reattachment to) the body.

It is in Descartes's elaboration on the *cogito* in his *Discourse on Method* that we see how the body and the ego, what I here call the self, are not necessarily connected:

I concluded that I was a substance whose whole essence or nature was only to think, and which, to exist, has no need of space nor of any material thing. Thus it follows that this ego, this soul, by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body and is easier to know than the latter, and that even if the body were not, the soul would not cease to be all that it is now. (21)

Not only does Descartes consider himself a "substance" entirely made up of thinking and without need of physical space or form, this substance – or soul – is easier to know than the body. In this account, the body becomes an unknowable and, frankly, uninteresting object that Descartes elsewhere likens to a machine.¹²³ Sawday observes that, "[A]s a machine, the body became objectified; a focus of intense curiosity, but entirely divorced from the world of the speaking and thinking subject. The division between Cartesian subject, and corporeal object, between an 'I' that thinks, and an 'it' in which 'we' reside, had become absolute" (29). Underlying the detachment that Esther feels, then, we may identify what, after Descartes, became a central conceptualization of the human body as a passive, non-thinking entity that houses the soul or self.

The doctor, Vincent, and Sandrine all want to know why and how Esther can do this to "her body" and "herself." Yet Esther never has a reply to this, appearing at

¹²³ It should be noted that Descartes gives animals the machine treatment too, and that likening the body to a machine may yield unexpected and potentially productive results when considering the agency it opens up for cyborgs and other "embodied machines."

times as if she does not even comprehend the question. When the doctor asks if Esther's leg in fact belongs to her, she looks genuinely unsure of the answer. For a split second, we find ourselves asking, *is* it her leg?, since Esther seems to wordlessly express that very question. We may read this uncertainty as another sign of the absence of a language to appropriately encompass and make sense of Esther's experience of detachment from her body.¹²⁴

The centrality of Esther's skin is emblematic of a larger preoccupation with surfaces and their permeability in *In My Skin*. It is evident throughout the film, with sudden close-ups of surfaces (the skin on Esther's thigh; the wooden cover of a desk) that remind us of the centrality of surfaces – intact, heterogeneous, permeable, broken. This preoccupation is visible beginning with the opening credits: in split screen, an image is shown to the left in positive exposure and to the right in negative exposure. We see shots of skyscrapers with hard, gleaming skins¹²⁵; everyday office materials stacked in cups or lying on desks; and empty, bare spaces – what Tarr calls "a remarkably effective introduction to the aseptitized, globalized economy which informs Esther's world" (87). This is the social context Esther inhabits: one in which skin is treated without being broken, where the body is a hard, intact surface amongst other hard, urban, intact surfaces. Esther and Vincent's apartment is sparingly and

¹²⁴ Throughout the film, there are episodes that show us how such detachment can occur in everyday situations, such as when Esther wakes up with an arm asleep. The sense of detachment is explored to more dramatic extent in a scene when Esther perceives an entire limb to be separated from her body. In keeping with the theme of curious exploration, her reactions to these occurrences – everyday as well as dramatic – is not horror but rather wordless puzzlement.

¹²⁵ The external layer of buildings is called "skin."

tastefully decorated; her office – the other major space of the film – is a kind of Platonic essence of "office": cubicles, grey carpets, strip lighting, computers. The interiors of the hotel rooms she rents in the movie are mostly non-descript, yet in the last hotel room, in the last scene, the furniture and fabrics are a little more colorful and less austere compared to the other interiors in the film. Overall, the bodies in *In My Skin* are recognizably regimented within a contemporary, urban setting, in which bodily boundaries are being kept neatly in place. Esther's invasive actions thus happen against a backdrop of modern, unbroken surfaces.

Extending the film's exploration of surfaces beyond the skin, two close-ups are particularly salient. These shots arrive suddenly in the form of close-ups in scenes that otherwise do not suggest any particular thematic connection to surfaces. The second shot of the film has the camera panning up Esther's naked leg in an extreme close-up while she sits at her desk, working. A wordless shot, one that seems to offer us a more intimate introduction to the main character (we see the little bumps, irregularities, and hairs on her thigh, whereas the first shot is a medium shot of Esther from the chest up), it establishes a closeness that we will come to have with Esther but also with surfaces, and especially the surface of the body, for the rest of the film. The second example occurs during a scene mid-way through the film, which shows us Esther talking on the phone while fiddling with the surface of her desk. There is a cut from a medium shot of Esther to an extreme close-up of the surface of the desk and Esther's fingers and nails, which are chipping away little bits of wood. The proximity to the image is startling, the noise of material coming loose for a moment deafening.

The sound trumps all consideration we may have for Esther's conversation. It is a mundane, everyday action that, at first glance, seems insignificant to the immediate narrative of the scene, yet the way it is drawn out by extreme close-up and put in undeniable focus indicates the film extends its explorations of surfaces beyond the skin. This wider engagement with various surfaces in the film makes it more difficult to dismiss Esther's corporeal intrusions as merely exceptional, violent episodes that now and again puncture the narrative. Instead, they work together with the less corporeal surface shots in creating a larger sensation of surfaces and their permeability.

II: SKIN AS PERCEPTUAL MEDIUM and EGO ENVELOPE

The French and English idioms we considered earlier all invoke skin as a covering that both literally and metaphorically influences how we conceive of our identity and that of others. The pliability of skin as a subject/object has lent itself to study from a range of approaches. Recent scholarship on skin is often multi-disciplinary, as in Claudia Benthien's *Skin* (2002), which straddles historical anthropology and cultural constructivism, or Steven Connor's *The Book of Skin* (2004), which addresses "the contemporary fascination with the power of the skin, as substance, vehicle and metaphor" across a broad range of historical, theoretical, and literary texts (Connor 9). Jay Prosser's *Second Skins* (1998) puts the importance of skin into the discussion of transition narratives, while Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey's edited collection *Thinking Through the Skin* (2001) takes skin as "a way of

thinking." In film studies, there is by now a rich body of scholarship, guided by phenomenology, on the "skin of the film" and how film functions as a proprioceptive body in mutual relationship with the viewer. Vivian Sobchack initiated this latter direction with *The Address of the Eye* (1992), followed by *Carnal Thoughts* (2004). Laura Marks's *The Skin of the Film* (2000) and *Touch* (2002) added the concept of "haptic visuality" to the discussion, and Jennifer Barker's *The Tactile Eye* (2009) continued the consolidation of phenomenological film theory as a category unto itself. There is also a substantial body of work on skin within the fields of psychology and medicine, much of the former based on the work of Didier Anzieu, psychoanalyst and author of *The Skin Ego* (1989).¹²⁶

Much of this work moves beyond the skin as surface to consider it as a prerequisite for becoming a subject, as the organizing principle for the self. That brings us to theories of embodied subjectivity. According to Gayle Salamon, theories of subjectivity "approach the question of what it means to assume a body by asserting the primacy of a 'felt sense' of the body, and the different means by which each discipline [in Salamon's case, phenomenology and psychoanalysis] does so" (2). Psychoanalysis, after Freud, calls this felt sense the "bodily ego" (or the skin ego in Anzieu's particular formulation); phenomenology calls it proprioception. Both of these models of embodied subjectivity stand in contrast to Cartesian dualism and argue for corporeality as a condition for the psyche to exist in the first place.

¹²⁶ This list is obviously grossly abbreviated, but it nevertheless indicates the interdisciplinarity and wide interest in skin as academic subject during the last couple of decades.

This chapter touches on several of the above-mentioned works, but focuses especially on how the work of Anzieu may illuminate the role of skin in the formation of an embodied, anti-Cartesian subject. Anzieu, to whom many have turned in recent scholarship on the body and embodiment, argues that embodiment arises from the very role skin plays in the formation of the ego.¹²⁷ He writes that skin provides "a mental image of which the Ego of the child makes use during the early phases of its development to represent itself as an Ego containing psychical contents, on the basis of its experience of the surface of the body" (*Skin Ego* 40).¹²⁸ Thus, the skin facilitates our understanding of an interior, the surface of the body aiding in conceptualizing what becomes identity, a feeling of self. Anzieu builds his claims on Freud's idea of the bodily ego, presented in *The Ego and the Id*. The passage Anzieu focuses on proclaims that, "[T]he ego is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface" (Freud 20). A footnote was added to this sentence in 1927, authorized – but not written – by Freud, which elaborates on this description of the ego: "I.e. the ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body. It may thus be regarded as a mental projection of the surface of the body, besides, as we have

¹²⁷ For a selection of books using Anzieu's theories particularly relevant to this chapter, see, for example, Elizabeth Grosz (1994), Jay Prosser (1998), Claudia Benthien (2002), and Gayle Salamon (2010).

¹²⁸ Anzieu emphasizes that skin contact between baby and mother while nursing is a situation in which touch is associated with feeding, care, and intimacy, one that constitutes a pre-verbal language that underlies later abilities to speak. As he rather delightfully puts it (with a bodily spin on Marshall McLuhan), "the massage becomes a message" (*Skin Ego* 39).

seen above, representing the superficialities of the mental apparatus" (20, note 16).¹²⁹

"Bodily sensations" thus attain decisive importance in this conception of the ego. In what Prosser calls "a wonderfully uncomplicated literalism," Anzieu interprets the "surface of the body" as skin (65).

Anzieu begins building the idea of the skin ego by looking at the place of skin in common language, remarking on idioms and colloquial expressions such as *entrer dans la peau d'un personnage* and *se faire crever la peau* (*Moi-peau* 35).¹³⁰ This pervasiveness of idioms based on skin points to the significance of tactility and sensation in making sense of and communicating with our surroundings.¹³¹ He goes on to trace skin's biological development as the "most vital" sense organ of the body since it is "a system of several sense organs (perceiving touch, pressure, pain, heat" that is "itself closely connected with the other organs or external sense (hearing, sight, smell, taste) and with the awareness of body movement and balance" (*Skin Ego* 14). Even if no sense is completely separate from the others, skin is the one that most incorporates and is most connected to all of them. He ends up with a complex psycho-physiological picture of how skin functions for us:

The primary function of the skin is as the sac which contains and retains inside it the goodness and fullness accumulating there through feeding, care,

¹²⁹ The most likely footnote writer is James Strachey, Freud's editor. It cannot be his translator, as there is a remark in the footnote that it does not appear in the German original version.

¹³⁰ Translation: "to get inside the skin of a character" and "to get a bullet in your hide" (*Skin Ego* 13).

¹³¹ However, Anzieu's claim that "the entry for 'touch' is the longest in the Oxford English Dictionary" is unfortunately not true (*Skin Ego* 13). (The longest OED entry was for a long time the verb "to set," which was toppled from fame by the verb "to make" in the June 2000 revision of the OED (see the March 2007 update of OED)).

the bathing in words. Its second function is as the interface which marks the boundary with the outside and keeps that outside out... Finally, the third function – which the skin shares with the mouth and which it performs at least as often – is as the site and a primary means of communicating with others, of establishing signifying relations; it is, moreover, an 'inscribing surface' for the marks left by those others. (*Skin Ego* 40)

Thus skin has several functions: it is the material that literally holds us together; it is our interface with the world, other people, and our own interior; and it is a site for communication and inscription.

The radical aspect of the importance Anzieu accords to skin is precisely that he sees the *surface* of the body as crucial to identity formation. Commonly, one's "self" or "identity" is talked about as internal; we invoke the *interior* of the body as the place for the "self," reflected in the passion of anatomists since the Renaissance to cut the body open and find the truth of it – its *essence* – in its core. Anzieu's theory also collapses Descartes's model of the self as the mind or soul, separate from the body. According to Anzieu, we would have no interior – call it self, mind, or soul – were it not for our body. Findings in neurobiology support this central position of materiality in the discovery that "[I]n the embryo, the skin and the brain are formed from the same membrane, the ectoderm; both are, in essence, surfaces" (Benthien 7). Even the brain is a "rind," which entails that "the human 'center' is actually situated at the periphery" (ibid.). This new understanding of what counts as central and peripheral to our constitution as embodied subjects explodes dualities: when the core is made up of the same material as the surface, severing them conceptually becomes difficult. Anzieu's skin ego makes it possible to think subjectivity as bodily material

that is not organized according to the center-periphery binary, suffused with consciousness.

Anzieu's emphasis on the centrality of the skin in the creation of the psyche thus develops Freud's idea of the bodily ego but focuses less on the unconscious and preconscious and more on what he calls the "container" of the psyche. He writes, "[P]sychoanalysis presents itself – or is generally presented – as a theory of unconscious and pre-conscious psychological contents... But a content cannot exist without some relation to a container" (*Skin Ego* 11). His aim is to address this relation, since he observes that it is increasingly the case that psychoanalysts are faced with pathological forms springing from "disturbances in the container-content relation" (*ibid.*). This view sets him apart from a Lacanian conception of subjectivity, where language is a central focus. Contrary to Lacan's assertion that the unconscious is structured like a language, for example, Anzieu proposes that "the unconscious seems to me to be structured like the body" (*qtd. in Prosser* 66).

With this model of subjectivity, it becomes possible to consider Esther's difficulty with language. Her bodily explorations are a connection to the not entirely conscious aspects of her own embodiment, which are making their way into her consciousness through a language particular to the body. Michel Serres describes the "voice" of the body this way: "[W]hen a body will not remain silent, what voice do we hear? Neither voice, nor language; coenaesthesia emits and receives thousands of messages: comfort, pleasure, pain, sickness, relief, tension, release – noises whispered

or wailing" (85).¹³² Recalling the embodied spectator's corporeal, affective language of discomfort and muddled pain-pleasures from the previous chapter, we see the unruly body and its affective layers appear in a different incarnation in the case of Esther's urgent need to get beneath her own skin.¹³³

The view of skin as ego envelope in *In My Skin* plays on our daily, intimate communication with our dermatological cover. Who has not been guilty of nibbling on a wayward cuticle, licking blood from a paper cut, or biting one's nails now and then? Going from such seemingly innocuous actions to actively cutting into, peeling off, or examining what is underneath the skin is more unusual.¹³⁴ That is arguably part of the pain and pleasure of watching *In My Skin*: it strikes familiar chords, since we are all more or less aware of our skin envelopes and our idiosyncratic relationships to them. However, Esther's actions take us beyond such casual auto-cannibalism and potentially into the realm of self-harm.

Self-harm can be defined as "intentional, self-effected, low-lethality bodily harm of a socially unacceptable nature, performed to reduce psychological distress"

¹³² Coenaesthesia is defined as "the general sense or feeling of existence arising from the sum of bodily impressions, as distinct from the definite sensations of the special senses; the vital sense" (*OED*).

¹³³ For more on the affective layers of the body, see Massumi (2002, Chapter 1).

¹³⁴ The common activity of biting or ripping off the tip of a cuticle is taken from the everyday to something approximating self-harm in a scene in *Black Swan* (dir. Darren Aronofski, 2011). Prima ballerina Nina Sayers (Natalie Portman) tries to trim a wayward bit of cuticle, but rips off an entire strip of skin all along her finger – like she is peeling a banana. It turns out this is happening in fantasy rather than reality, but the close-up of the small strip of skin being suddenly ripped off her finger still evokes a powerful extreme of a usually undramatic action.

(Barent Walsh 4).¹³⁵ The contemporary literature on self-harm (or self-injury) is extensive and comprises both medical texts and personal accounts. The phenomenon has entered the realm of popular culture through films like *Girl, Interrupted* (dir. James Mangold, 1999), *The Piano Teacher* (dir. Michael Haneke, 2001) *Secretary* (dir. Steven Shainberg, 2002), *Thirteen* (dir. Catherine Hardwicke, 2003), and *Black Swan* (dir. Darren Aronofski, 2010), which portray it as a phenomenon explored by girls and women.¹³⁶

It is perhaps not surprising that many relegate *In My Skin* to the category of films dealing with self-harm. The relatively limited scholarship on *In My Skin* focuses mostly on the film's narrative treatment of self-harm or self-mutilation, the pathological condition understood within a medical and psychiatric paradigm (Carrie Tarr 2006; Tim Palmer 2011). Tarr, for example, wants to read the representations of self-harm in *In My Skin* "at a more rational level" compared to its excessive

¹³⁵ Self-harm is not classified as a disorder in the DSM-IV, but rather appears as symptom in conjunction with, for example, borderline personality disorder. It is thus defined as symptom and coping strategy, not as a disorder in itself. An important part of the definition of self-harm is that it is usually not linked to suicidal tendencies; cutting is not symptomatic of a wish to kill oneself. Rather, it is viewed as a coping mechanism.

¹³⁶ There is frequently a certain dismissive tone in the critical writing on films such as these. *New York Times* film critic Stephen Holden, for example, describes *Girl, Interrupted* as "a small, intense period piece with a hardheaded tough-love attitude toward lazy, self-indulgent little girls flirting with madness" (n.p.). Similarly, *The Independent's* Kaleem Aftab's assertion that such films "involve characters (usually female) hating themselves to the extent that they will cut themselves" says something about the lack of nuance when treating the subject of self-harm in popular culture (n.p.). Rather than being taken on as a complex and heterogeneous practice, cutting into one's own body is reduced to "little girls who hate themselves." It is also mildly baffling that Aftab lumps together the self-dismemberment in films like *Saw* (dir. James Wan, 2004) and *127 Hours* (dir. Danny Boyle, 2010), in which the protagonists are forced to cut off limbs to survive in extreme circumstances, with the self-harm in films like *Girl, Interrupted* and *Black Swan*, which clearly stems from very different circumstances and urges.

representation on screen, in order to see what it has to say about the wider issue of self-harm (79). Wanting to rationalize Esther's cutting means putting her actions in a recognizable – and consequently a bounded, understandable – category of illness. It is a defined pattern of actions that may be treated with therapy and/or medication. As we will see, Esther ultimately resists this etiology, but before we reach that point, I want to point out how self-harm *does* play into the narrative of Esther's actions.

In the scene where Esther cuts herself for the first time, the film echoes accounts of self-harm in its version of "release," a common topic in self-harm literature.¹³⁷ Esther's first cutting episode does seem to offer her a release from the stress associated with office life. The episode begins with Esther typing away on her computer at her desk, having just received feedback from her boss on a report. The camera cuts between close-ups of Esther's computer screen, where words materialize, her hands on the keyboard, which move joltingly and unevenly, and her face, which looks intent and at the same time distracted. She bites her lip, her glance flickers away from the screen intermittently, and it is obvious that she has difficulties concentrating on the task at hand. She is worked up, preoccupied, and tense.

Suddenly she gets up, a little hesitantly but also urgently, and walks out of the room. The film cuts to her walking into what looks like a basement corridor: it is

¹³⁷ Carolyn Smith writes in her memoir of her personal experience of self-harm, *Cutting it Out: A Journey through Psychotherapy and Self-Harm* (2005): "*Count the scars. Don't let them disappear. If they disappear you won't be real, you won't exist. The sting keeps you alive, brings you back from the edge*" (15; italics in original). This sentiment is close to how we interpret Lee's need to cut in *Secretary* too: as a release from a troubled place where she is unable to express her emotions. Similarly, Tracie in *Thirteen* cuts directly after having emotionally upsetting encounters with her parents, when she seems to need an outlet for her anger and sadness. In such settings, the act of cutting seems to follow the definition of self-injury in that it is performed to reduce psychological distress.

sparsely lit and unpopulated, and we get a peek of an archive room at the end of the hallway. She squats down on the floor, pulls her pants down, and takes off her boots. There is a cut to an extreme close-up of her face while we hear ripping sounds of both fabric and skin. We hear several sharp intakes of breath while her face is concentrated and intense, but it is unclear whether this expression stems from pain or pleasure – both, it seems.¹³⁸ The camera zooms out into a medium close-up of Esther, now sitting squarely on the floor. She finds a metal object off-camera, stretches her leg out, and starts cutting into it. The camera never shows the actual wound, but from her movements and facial expression we infer that she is cutting. The camera zooms in a little to show her flexed arm muscles, indicating that she uses a lot of force to cut into what we presume from the angle to be her thigh. The intensity of the scene is marked by the urgency that Esther expresses once she comes down into the basement and the apparent compulsive nature of her cutting. There is desperation in her movements when she pulls her pants down and in her frantic scrambling after a suitable tool for cutting, as if things cannot happen fast enough.

Moments after we see her cutting herself in the basement, a giddy and smiling Esther approaches Sandrine's cubicle and tries to convince Sandrine to come out for a coffee. The cutting has clearly excited Esther but when she seeks to share her

¹³⁸ It is generally hard to gauge the level of pain Esther is in and if the desire for pain is what motivates her to cut. As we saw in the party scene at the beginning of the film, Esther's pain threshold is most likely higher than what is considered normal since she does not notice the rather sizable gash on her leg until she sees her own bloody footprints. From her occasionally contorted facial expression and sharp intakes of breath, however, it is safe to assume that pain plays some part of the corporeal exploration she is undertaking even though it is not at the forefront of how her actions are portrayed.

excitement with Sandrine, she does not get the reaction she expects. Esther says, "I've been cooped up all day. Not even a lunch break. In my office," before leaning in and whispering conspiratorially with a smile: "Then I cut myself in the store room. The store room, my office... The air-conditioning, no windows open, I can't breathe..." At this, Sandrine looks uncomfortable. "I'll be ok," says Esther, still smiling. Looking confused and suspicious, Sandrine tells Esther where to find the first aid box, if she is hurt. Esther laughs and says, "I see. I'll go find it." Sandrine asks, "Wait. How did you cut yourself?" Esther leans in and whispers, "On a metal thing." Sandrine replies curtly, "I guessed that. What were you doing with it?" Esther's reply makes it seem like she is stating the obvious: "Cutting myself!" she says with a big smile.

At first glance, Esther's confession puts her cutting down to needing to let pressure out (cooped up in her office, no breaks, couldn't breathe), but her excitement does not convey it as an activity borne out of unhappiness or emotional turmoil as such. It is tempting to read Esther's delight in telling Sandrine about her cutting as a sign that Esther is unaware of the social and moral injunctions against self-harm, and that she instead revels freely in her cutting. However, Esther does hide when she cuts and goes to great lengths to cover up her wounds as the film progresses. She seems to find Sandrine's advice to seek medical treatment funny because Esther realizes this is the default way to deal with unwanted accidents: seek medical attention. Yet this was not an accidental wound, but rather one that she was eager to make. Moreover, considering the tone of Esther's confession to Sandrine, this intentional wound has

different psychological underpinnings than those found in conventional self-harm narratives.

The first cutting scene is a turning point in the film. Before this, we have seen Esther's relative indifference to having her leg stitched up, close-ups of her leg when she changes the bandage on her wound, and her gentle treatment of her leg when getting dressed. What we have not seen is the unbridled curiosity, desire, or a mix of the two, which drives Esther to make *new* entry points into her skin. After her cutting episode in the office basement, her attitude changes from passive bemusement and wonder at her own detachment, to active searching for a way into the body.

Esther and Sandrine's conversation about Esther's cutting at the office, and their conversation at Sandrine's house later that night, demonstrates why it is ultimately unsatisfactory to put Esther's actions down to self-harm as it is defined in the psychiatric literature and portrayed on film. Sandrine's attitude when Esther confides in her about her first cutting episode is rooted in a pathologizing paradigm: "you could see a doctor. Get some pills. I do, if I'm depressed or anxious. You could see my doctor. But he'd probably have you certified!" The last sentence is said jokingly and they both laugh, but the serious undertone lingers. Sandrine's habit of self-medicating when she feels depressed or anxious signals her ease of dealing with the unwanted and uncomfortable by taking drugs, as opposed to pondering why she feels like that. Similarly, instead of pressing Esther about what leads her to cut, Sandrine pathologizes her and suggests treatment. Esther does not subscribe to

Sandrine's view of Esther's cutting – that much is clear from her initial confession – and she becomes guarded after Sandrine's rejection of her excitement.

To adopt Sandrine's attitude and classifying Esther as a cutter, adhering to the common etiology of self-harm, would make Esther's actions easier to stomach – classification yields a measure of distance, and thus safety, from the somehow unbearable thought of cutting into one's own body. Yet such a classification also affords us a too limited scope for understanding the interstices between the body, skin, flesh, pain, and pleasure in film. *In My Skin* challenges the viewer to diversify her or his interpretation of what these interstices may signify. Lamenting the limited range of the portrayal of sex on film, Williams analyzes "how impoverished the repertoire of gestures and emotions, the performance of most cinematic sex acts have been" ("Cinema and the Sex Act" 22). Similarly, de Van's film might be described as portraying self-harm narratives and images, but does so on a scale richer than in some of the films mentioned above. Without discounting the deep discomfort images from other self-harm films may trigger in the audience, I argue that the "flesh shots" in *In My Skin* draw not only on the visual conventions of self-harm, but go further in their portrayal of flesh and blood.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ Lee Holloway's self-harm in *Secretary* is shown in her accidental baring of the slim, symmetrically placed band-aids covering cuts on her thighs, and we see Erika Kohut in *The Piano Teacher* cut herself in the genital region (which is hidden from view by a robe) with a razor blade until a single, thin trail of blood runs down her leg. It should be noted that if the viewer has had experience with cutting, any images depicting cutting into the body – and perhaps especially images as graphic as in *In My Skin* – may act as psychological "triggers." Conversely, some viewers are so accustomed to extreme images in, for example, horror films that the images in *In My Skin* do not pose much of a challenge. I want to note this because when analyzing images as explicit as they appear in *In My Skin*, the range of reactions may vary more than usual from viewer to viewer.

We now have an impression of how skin appears as the material that matters the most in *In My Skin*, both concretely in Esther's cutting – especially its connection to and transcending of self-harm narratives – and as a broader logic in terms of surfaces like skins of buildings and objects. Esther's skin is not only the dermatological envelope that ensures her physical and psychical coherence; it also acts as a fetishistic reminder of her cutting episodes. The first time we see this use of skin happens shortly after Esther's first trip to the hotel. She walks down a road with Vincent, talking about apartment hunting, when she excuses herself to go to the ATM. The camera shows us Esther in a frontal medium close-up, taking out her wallet and opening it. A cut brings us to the wallet, where Esther's fingers hesitate for a second before taking out a little pouch made of waxed paper. Shaking slightly, she opens the pouch and we see several small scraps of skin and flesh, dried out since she cut them off at the hotel. The film cuts back to Esther's face as sudden emotion floods it, and tears spring to her eyes. She blinks through the tears, staring despondently at the skin, and with shaking hands takes out a stick of lip balm from her purse and tries to apply it to the pieces.

In this scene, Esther handles the pieces of skin – literal pieces of herself hidden in her wallet – as if they are precious keepsakes that have perished and are irrevocably lost to her. Her tearful reaction to the pieces' dead condition suggests their fetishistic character. Stuck into the pocket in her wallet where people usually place

photographs of their loved ones, this skin fetish is also a memento.¹⁴⁰ The sudden mourning suggests that the pieces of skin have lost their power now that they are dead. As long as they were in the same condition as they were while attached to her body, they retained their power, but now that they have become dried and disfigured, they are no longer *her* but alien material.

After this first failure to keep bits of her skin in original condition when cut from her body, Esther makes a second, more concerted effort. In the middle of her next hotel episode, Esther ventures out to a pharmacy, bringing with her a small glass bottle that holds a fairly sizeable, rectangular piece of pink skin submerged in water. Earlier in the scene in the hotel room we have seen her mark this piece on her leg (not unlike the lines drawn by plastic surgeons before an operation, but with a solid instead of a dotted line), followed by shot fragments of the process to cut it out. She asks the pharmacist for formalin to preserve it, which he informs her is illegal to buy and sell. He advises her to tan the piece, and she asks urgently if this will keep it "smooth and soft." The pharmacist replies "yes, like anything made of leather."¹⁴¹ In this way, Esther's human skin becomes associated with its animal counterpart, which routinely is turned into leather for human use.

¹⁴⁰ There is a potential argument to be made about the skin in her wallet as currency (she discovers it when she is at the ATM to withdraw money) but in this particular context, the fetish and memento lie closer to my analysis.

¹⁴¹ Invoking Patricia White's idea of retrospectatorship from the previous chapter, those of us who have seen *Silence of the Lambs* (dir. Jonathan Demme, 1991) will in this scene possibly have an affective memory of Buffalo Bill (another character not at ease in his skin) and his obsession with his victims treating their skin with lotion before he cuts it off to make a stitched-together female skin (or hide) for himself: "it rubs the lotion on its skin!" as he exhorts the de-gendered senator's daughter he keeps trapped in a well beneath his house.

The pharmacist acknowledges her skin to be a separate entity, a product. Yet he misunderstands; that is not what Esther is aiming at. She wants the skin to stay in its original condition, only outside and apart from her body. When Esther wakes up the morning after applying the tanning agents to the piece of skin, we quickly see that the tanning process has not worked according to Esther's intentions, leaving the piece of skin brittle and dark brown. She touches it gingerly and carefully picks it up, placing it lovingly against the bright, still living skin on her chest. She slides it into one of her bra cups, nestling it and her breast with her hands and kissing her breast before getting dressed. The realization that skin cannot live on its own, apart from a person, seems clear both to Esther and the audience in this scene. Her skin is irrevocably connected to her living body, and once it is cut out, it ceases to be part of her in the same way.¹⁴²

III: FROM SKIN INTO FLESH

Instead of acting as talismans or fetish objects, then, Esther's detached skin invokes the process of abjection (Julia Kristeva 1982). The dried-up pieces of skin are bodily remnants that have been expelled and thus cease to be part of the body while still invoking it. At first glance, the process of abjecting her body is also what Esther's does during her first visit to the hotel; yet in this instance the process is complicated by ingestion. As Esther is sucking, biting, nibbling, chewing, and then spitting out

¹⁴² Technical advances in skin growing and grafting complicate a blanket statement that skin cannot live apart from a body. Here, however, is a question of Esther's specific skin, and that cannot stay "smooth and supple" separated from her larger skin envelope.

pieces of herself, she seems to enact the twofold process of abjection: "I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish *myself*" (Kristeva 3). In Kristeva's theory, this is a process that takes place in very early childhood, when the child begins its process of separation from the mother and the establishment of its own identity by rejecting the maternal body and all the body fluids and substances associated with it – milk, vomit, feces, blood. As Grosz puts it, "[T]he subject's definitive place as an 'I' in discourse occurs only when vocalization substitutes for the pleasures of the maternal body, when the desire of the mother is exchanged for the Father's Name" (101). This movement is absolutely crucial, because not to separate from the mother means not to enter the symbolic, which in turn means existing outside of social signification, in what amounts to psychosis.

Abjection is first performed by expulsing unwanted bodily substances, such as spit, vomit, and excrement and other bodily fluids. However, such matter will always be part of oneself; hence, one abjects oneself at the same time as establishing oneself. We are founded on the bodily matter we want to get rid of. We get a glimpse of this in the hotel scene: Esther is on the floor, carving little pieces of flesh out of her thigh, pieces she half cuts out with a knife, then bites or nibbles off, chews, before taking them out of her mouth again with her fingers. She lets all the little pieces of flesh and skin rain down on her face, closing her eyes with a beatific expression, as if showering herself with precious materials.

Here it is not a question of the skin of the milk – Kristeva's most distinct example of food loathing leading to a sense of the abject – but the skin of the *self*, the very material we are made of, that we perceive to be abjected. In this scene, Esther seems to be abjecting herself in the form of her skin and flesh, but at closer look, she is in fact ingesting some of the pieces of previously abjected material. She is eliminating the abject, but only in order to reclaim it and make it part of herself through ingestion. Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok theorize such ingestion as a way to refuse to incorporate loss. They write,

[W]hen, in the form of imaginary or real nourishment, we ingest the love-object we miss, this means that *we refuse to mourn* and that we shun the consequences of mourning even though our psyche is fully bereaved... Incorporation is the refusal to claim as our own the part of ourselves that we placed in what we lost; incorporation is the refusal to acknowledge the full import of the loss, a loss that, if recognized as such, would effectively transform us. (127)

The love object incorporated in this case is the body itself, skin and flesh. According to this model, Esther ingests her body to refuse mourning a loss she has suffered, one whose acknowledgement would bring about her transformation. There are no self-evident signs in the film pointing to such a loss, but if we read the action through the question of Cartesian embodiment, Esther ingesting herself is a refusal to mourn the body/mind split. Considering the staunch upholding of the boundaries between her corporeal explorations, tucked away in secluded places, and her "normal" life, lived in the open with Vincent and at her office, it is not unlikely that her ingestion points to the difficulty she has reconciling the spheres of Cartesian and non-Cartesian

existence. As Grosz emphasizes in her formulation of "psychic corporeality," such a state of being does not preclude being at odds with other kinds of matter. We may add that no embodiment is ever fully homogenous or coherent; gaps and ruptures are inevitable parts of lived experience.

In addition to considering Esther's ingestion of herself as a refusal to mourn her loss of embodied subjectivity, I venture that what drives Esther to cannibalize herself is a strong desire to *touch*. She is not satisfied by touching the surface of the body, but wants to touch what is underneath the skin too. She wants to go beyond the common surface touch, which is part of our daily lives, and touch flesh. In the scenes where she carves up her body, there is an urge to get beneath the skin and to touch skin and flesh with fingers, mouth, and tongue.

Esther's cannibalism fashions a version of touch that entirely transgresses the boundaries between inside and outside and ends in consumption. The fact that Esther does this to herself and not to others makes the cannibalism in *In My Skin* different from, for example, the cannibalism in *Trouble Every Day* (dir. Claire Denis, 2001), a film that is often mentioned in association with *In My Skin*.¹⁴³ What the two films have in common is that they depart from the recent tendency to portray human flesh being cooked as food.¹⁴⁴ While the cannibalism in films like *The Cook, the Thief, His*

¹⁴³ *In My Skin* and *Trouble Every Day* are part of a larger history of cinematic representations of cannibalism. As the aptly named *Encyclopedia of Cannibal Movies* can confirm, cannibalism has a long history on celluloid. The films collected in the *Encyclopedia* range from porn to exploitation flicks, exploration movies in the tradition of New World reports, satire, drama, and horror. The horror genre has an especially long-standing tradition of depicting cannibalism.

¹⁴⁴ This trend is evident in *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* (dir. Peter Greenaway, 1989), in which Georgina Spica (Helen Mirren), the wife of the ruthless gangster

Wife and Her Lover fits with the film's highly stylized, gangster crime-and-retribution format, and *Delicatessen* uses it as black comedy, the cannibalism in *Trouble Every Day* and *In My Skin* explicitly invokes the connection between consuming flesh and sex. Both films portray eating human flesh as an extension of a sensual engagement with the body, stretching our common conceptions of intimacy.

Trouble Every Day presents the clearest portrayal of sex and cannibalism of the two, beginning in its very first scene. We see Coré (Béatrice Dalle) stand by a highway at dusk, clutching her parka, when a truck pulls over and backs up to where she stands. The film cuts to nighttime, when a man on a motorcycle (Alex Descas) drives up to the truck, which seems empty. He looks around and sees a shoe on the ground, which prompts him to search the nearby grassy slope next to the highway. He finds a man lying dead in the grass, covered in blood and without pants on, looking like he has had his lips chewed off. A little way off, we see Coré sitting on the slope, rocking gently with her arms around her knees, her mouth and face bloody. The man on the motorcycle – whom we soon learn is her husband and caretaker, Léo – cuddles her carefully. It becomes clear that Coré, in order to satisfy her bloodlust, periodically escapes her house in Paris (where Léo locks her up in the attic) and stands by the highway to lure truckers to what they think is a sexual encounter, but which ends up as a feeding orgy.

Albert Spica (Michael Gambon), serves her husband the glazed and cooked body of her lover, whom her husband has tortured and killed, and forces him to eat it. *Delicatessen* (dir. Marc Caro and Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 1991) is another example that shows human flesh as food, sourced from local tenants in a boarding house set in a war-ridden, post-apocalyptic future.

We find a similar structure of sexual encounter-turned cannibalistic feeding in the storyline that mirrors Coré's, that of her fellow cannibal, the New Yorker Shane Brown (Vincent Gallo). While the official story is that he is going to Paris with his wife June (Tricia Vessey) on their honeymoon, we quickly learn that Shane has been infected with the same virus as Coré and that he is running out of the medication that suppresses his desire to eat human flesh.¹⁴⁵ The only place he can get more is from doctor Léo Sémenau in Paris, Coré's husband. As Shane's fantasies of a blood-soaked June flash by while they sit on the plane to Paris, we realize that his bloodlust is barely concealed. When they get to their Paris hotel, the caressing, somewhat aggressive and sexualizing point-of-view shots of the hotel maid's neck and calves further indicates Shane's imminent breakdown. And the breakdown comes: Shane seduces the maid, Christelle (Florence Loiret Caille), in the employees' changing rooms, their mutual embrace quickly evolving into rape, and ending with one of the most literal representations of "eating someone out" ever portrayed on film.

The consumption of flesh is thus expressly linked to consuming someone in passion.¹⁴⁶ According to Maggie Kilgour, eating is always marked by ambivalence

¹⁴⁵ Coré and Shane were both part of a research team in the jungle in Guyana when they contracted the cannibal virus. Thus, the origin of their bloodlust is not in their own individual, mad psyches, as much of contemporary cannibalism is portrayed, but stems from them being infected with a virus that develops into a fully fledged illness with an identifiable origin. It is tempting to read the origin of this virus – the South American jungle – in keeping with the history of exploration narratives about cannibals from three hundred years earlier.

¹⁴⁶ In "Cannibalism, Homophobia, Women," Carla Freccero argues through readings of Montaigne that cannibalism is particularly emblematic of homosocial, disavowed desire, from which women are excluded. She reads the language of (ultimately nonphysical) cannibalism in Montaigne's treatment of male friendship as "precisely illustrating one of the meanings of homophobia, as an excessive fear of the same that founds itself on a disavowal of desire for the same" (80).

since it includes both aggression and desire, and since it always ends with one party consuming the other (7). Furthermore, Kilgour writes, "[K]issing and eating are obviously both oral activities, and at an extreme level of intensity the erotic and aggressive sides of incorporation cannot be differentiated, so that it becomes difficult to tell at what point the desire for consummation turns into the desire for consumption" (8). The desire for consumption is literalized in the scene with Shane and the maid in *Trouble Every Day*. At first their kisses and embrace are reciprocal, passionate, and reminiscent of other love scenes. Then there is a shift: Shane becomes more aggressive, more insistent in his kisses and touching, to the point where he forces the maid to the floor and begins consuming the flesh he kissed a moment earlier.

The main difference between the cannibalism in *Trouble Every Day* and *In My Skin* is their origin. In the former, cannibalism is induced by an unfamiliar virus. It is an illness that threatens to overwhelm unless it is contained by medicine. This portrayal of cannibalism evokes both zombie films and the numerous "savage cannibal tribe" films (which in turn are part of a long Western tradition that portrays far-flung peoples as anthropophagic). Conversely, in *In My Skin* cannibalism is part of a larger pattern of bodily self-exploration whose impulse seems to originate from inside Esther rather than from an external agent. Esther's appetite for her own flesh is moreover not her main aim but subordinated to her desire to open up the skin and touch, lick, and caress her own materiality.

Apart from the contrasting origins of cannibalism in the two films, their generic vocabularies are different: while *Trouble Every Day* aligns itself more explicitly with the genres of horror and thrillers, *In My Skin's* ambiguous genre affiliation includes tropes, images, and plot points from horror, porn, drama, and romance to create its own "body genre," in Linda Williams's formulation. The way Esther explores the cuts she makes into her body with her hands, lips, and tongue reminds us of a woman exploring her lover's body, its curves, openings, and surfaces. Particularly the first time Esther rents a hotel room to explore her desires, the camera moves in a way that suggests that Esther is embracing, kissing, and licking a lover – which turns out to be not another person but her own flesh. The way she nibbles and caresses her open wounds would not be out of place in a cinematic portrayal of a more commonplace sexual encounter, if it were not for the blood dripping down on her face while she kisses the wound she has made on her leg. She calmly wipes away the blood from her eyes, spreading it all across her face in the process. The resulting image is confusing: her manner is loving, caressing, desirous, but her face is smeared with blood. While Coré's bloodlust is always directed at other people, Esther has a taste for her own blood only. Hence the sexuality expressed in the two films also differs; Coré takes another person as love object while Esther chooses herself.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ That said, the scene in *Trouble Every Day* where Coré seduces a young man who has broken into her house is pictured not entirely unlike Esther's secret tryst with herself. As Coré is caressing the man's naked chest, she suddenly bites into it. His moans of pleasure modulate into screams of horror while Coré eats away at his face and body. An element of pure sexual-cannibalistic joy is shared between the two scenes but *In My Skin's* scene arguably comes down on the side of romance and porn (albeit bloody versions) and the one from *Trouble Every Day* on the side of horror.

Vincent, Esther's boyfriend, quickly picks up on Esther's new love for her own body. After Esther's initial accident in the garden, he plays the jealous partner when he says, "what were you doing in that garden? Admit it, you were on the make!" And later, when he tries to figure out why Esther cannot stop cutting herself: "I'm not a drag or a pain, am I?" He focuses on Esther's actions as a betrayal, making them about him and his abilities as a lover and companion. He is immediately suspicious after her initial accident because he thinks her indifference to pain means that she cannot feel his touch, and that she consequently must be intimately and sexually dissatisfied by him. He increasingly sees Esther's explorations of her own flesh as a betrayal of him as a sexual partner, implying further that she is being unfaithful *with her own body* since there is a sexual element to her explorations. Here is none of the mutual excitement at bodily mutilation that we see, for example, in David Cronenberg's *Crash* (1996). Vincent may offer to care for Esther's wound, but he is ultimately feeling threatened, not excited, by the power her own flesh holds over her. Given the way Esther keeps the focus on her own body to herself – Vincent may not offer to take part in her excursions but she certainly does not invite him to either – Vincent's jealousy is somewhat understandable.

Portraying Esther as acting like she is sneaking off to meet a stranger for illicit love-making and covering up her "encounters," the film draws on familiar tropes from the genres of romance and drama. Yet here the stranger is Esther's own body and the secret assignations are occasions for another kind of familiarization than in the common plot of infidelity. De Van states that, "I was drawn to the subject because

of the feeling that the body could become a stranger, that there might be a distance between consciousness and the life of the body" (qtd. in Palmer 80).¹⁴⁸ In the film, de Van lets the body rebel from its passive position: instead of being subservient to the mind, or consciousness, it is its own agent in becoming a "stranger." That the body can be a stranger implies a lack of embodied knowledge, a deepening of the Cartesian split to the extent that the body is not only intellectually but emotionally unknowable: it cannot be known and it cannot be felt.

Despite de Van's description of the body as a stranger, I read Esther's actions as attempts at re-centering the body through recognizing that she is a material being: instead of the mind controlling the body, the body takes on a life of its own. This becomes clear in the scene depicting a business dinner with Esther, the two clients Esther is working closely with, and her boss, Daniel. In a fine-dining restaurant, the two (nameless) clients, Daniel, and Esther are sitting at a round table. The client talks effusively of his wine choice and offers Esther some, who refuses with a smile and says that she prefers water. After some pressing, Esther changes her mind and accepts a glass, which she empties quickly while the rest of her companions make small talk. The male client pours her another glass. Esther glances around at the others but does

¹⁴⁸ In this context it is apt to note that in preparation for her role in *In My Skin*, de Van did "defamiliarizing" exercises for a year before starting to film (Palmer 84). The exercises included "walking around in uncomfortable shoes, buying and wearing clothes that she disliked, growing her fingernails to awkward lengths, and so on" in order to "increase her objectivity and self-detachment" (ibid.). These exercises imply that treating your body unusually in terms of the practices that you usually engage in in order to feel like "yourself," you become less subjective in your view of it. In other words, it is possible to *detach* yourself from yourself (or is it only your material self, your body?) and look at yourself from the outside, from an allegedly (more) objective standpoint through changing your felt sense of the body.

not say much while the others talk. The male client continues talking, now about country-specific marketing campaigns, while the camera cuts from face to face of the four diners in close-ups from the shoulder up. Esther contributes small comments, laughs at what other people are saying, and keeps drinking more wine.

Then the scene takes a turn. As the clients are remarking that certain bodily gestures employed in luxury goods marketing campaigns can be perceived as elegant in France and extremely rude in Japan, the camera switches to a point-of-view shot from Esther of her plate, with pieces of meat and green beans on it. Suddenly her left hand grips the meat aggressively, and her right hand has to forcibly lift her left hand off the plate and restrain it on the left side of the plate. The camera cuts to the female client talking without taking notice of Esther's roaming hand, then to Esther who looks around with a slightly dazed expression. The camera goes back to the plate, where the left hand is again clutching the meat. The right hand stops it once more. The camera cuts to Esther's face, which is impassive. The conversation between the other three continues, now with Daniel extolling the virtues of Lisbon as a city he *might* just consider living in, although Paris is of course the best city in Europe. Next, we see a close-up of Esther's right hand keeping her left hand down on the tablecloth; then the camera pans up her left arm together with her right hand. When we get to the elbow, her left arm suddenly stops: it is cut off cleanly below the elbow, without blood or other bodily matters; it looks like a detachable wax arm lying on the table. The camera cuts back to Esther's face, which looks impassive. Then, in rather spectacular surrealist fashion, the camera moves 180 degrees to a medium shot of the

whole table, showing the two clients and Daniel in lively conversation while Esther, nonplussed, is looking down at her arm lying severed on the table in front of her.

We switch to a point-of-view shot from Esther showing her right hand touching the end of her left arm, feeling its way around the edges of the stump. When the waiter comes to take away the plates, Esther grabs her left arm in alarm, for a moment seemingly thinking that her arm is what the waiter wants to clear away. The waiter excuses himself and tells her to take her time, and Esther pulls her severed arm down to her lap. Suddenly it is attached again and she feels it, kneads it, as if to check whether it is really part of her. Going further, she slips her steak knife down to her lap and begins prodding her left arm with it. All the while, the shots of her face seem to show her following the conversation, albeit with an absent-minded look. The camera begins moving from face to face in close-ups again, as the discussion of which European cities are the best continues – this time moving to Rome – interspersed with close-ups of Esther's right arm cutting into her left arm on her lap, until trails of blood appear. Occasional glances from her boss and the two clients betray their suspicion that something is not quite right, but Esther produces the occasional smile that assuages their suspicions. While she buries a fork into her arm, she lets out a small, involuntary sigh (of contentment? Pain?) that momentarily stops conversation and makes her company look at her. She smiles, and they get back to talking.

The superficial but professional chatter about bodily gestures in marketing and charming European cities stands in stark contrast, first, to Esther's arm being detached and her subsequent knife-and-fork intervention to check on the limb's renewed

attachment, and second, to the following sequence that intersperses medium close-ups of Esther's face looking around the table with close-ups of food: chicken being ripped from the bone; a rare steak drenched in its own juice, cut up on a plate; someone peeling and breaking open a grape. Even though we hear the conversation immediately in the background, as if all these images are from the table, we see that they are not if we pay attention to attire and dishes in the medium shots. The same goes for the shot of a figure ripping open tan stockings with their fingernails underneath the table. Neither the meals nor attires match Esther or her party, yet the diegetic sound and Esther's eyeline shots seem to place them around the same table.

This quick succession of shots – close-ups of faces, food, ripped stockings – together creates a dizzying effect of association that is first and foremost embodied: the ripping open of food becomes linked to the ripping of (skin-like) stockings and Esther cutting into flesh until the skin is broken. The images are affectively linked through the textures of flesh and different skins, and how these are peeled off or torn apart by cutlery or naked fingers. Across the different shots, bodies (or parts of bodies) are being forced open, made to yield and rip apart – an expanded and multifaceted montage foreshadowing what is to come for Esther. This non-diegetic string of shots effectively expresses how the world (and not only the one we see immediately surrounding Esther) is cut up and separated, its various fleshs separated and divided, both from their own skins and from each other.

Against the backdrop of the easily flowing, inane conversation that only Esther's little sigh halts for a moment, the detached arm seems like an almost logical

reaction: the inappropriate body forces itself to the forefront when confronted with a conversation about projecting oneself out and into different places, which brings her dinner companions' disembodied relation to a globalized world to the forefront.

Esther's cut-off arm is a response to feeling entirely abstracted from the situation. But before that, Esther's hand gripping the meat gives us a hint of what is to come, namely the return to *feeling* flesh, be it animal or human.

In this scene, it is hard not to read Esther's sudden perception of her detached arm as anything other than bodily alienation: her confounded look, her disbelief while prodding her cut-off arm with a steak knife, and finally, her almost ashamed gesture when she tucks the arm into her jacket sleeve and scuttles off, away from the table. Moreover, it is possible to argue that her subsequent trip to the hotel, where she proceeds to cut and explore her body, is just another expression for the disconnection she is feeling from her body and the world. Her subsequent burying into her flesh and incorporation of her own materiality can be read as her way of addressing the alienation she feels from the fragmented world represented in the dinner scene.

At this point, however, the film changes embodied perspectives. When Esther begins her exploration and incorporation of her own flesh, she begins the process of abandoning the subject split into mind and body, embracing instead Grosz's "psychic corporeality," which "refuses reductionism, resists dualism, and remains suspicious of the holism and unity implied by monism," thereby fashioning notions that "see human materiality in continuity with organic and inorganic matter but also at odds with other

forms of matter" (22). Such a corporeality suffuses the body with subjectivity and re-joins body and mind.

Since "the world is made of the same stuff as the body," as Merleau-Ponty says, the realization Esther has during dinner that her own flesh and the flesh on her plate are parts of the same flesh of the world prompts her to break through her own skin in order to assert continuity with the world (*Primacy of Perception* 163). The closed, hard surfaces that surround Esther in the film, including the bodily surfaces of the people around her who fear the breaking of skin (represented mainly by Sandrine and Vincent), do not facilitate an understanding of the body as part of the world, as flesh part of flesh.

To understand the body's place in this way, we need to consider Esther's "being-in-the-world," an idea that Maurice Merleau-Ponty presented in his *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962), and reworked into the term "flesh" in his last book, *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968). Being-in-the-world means that the relation of our self to the world must be understood by first examining how we come to experience our self through our body. Before we turn to the world and begin perceiving objects other than our own body, however, an initial state of generality must exist, a pre-objective view, what Merleau-Ponty calls "being-in-the-world": "Prior to stimuli and sensory contents, we must recognize a kind of inner diaphragm, which determines, infinitely more than they do, what our reflexes and perceptions will be able to aim at in the world, the area of our possible operations, the scope of our life" (*Phenomenology* 92). Being-in-the-world is not wholly articulate and

determinate, and it constantly appears around our personal existence to structure our experiences. It is what conditions our existence; that which acts as our constituting outside as well as inside, *before* we turn our bodies out toward objects in the world.

Merleau-Ponty considers the multiple elements underlying how our perception helps us relate to our self and the world around us, for example the workings of our body's spatiality and motility. The body as the starting point for any experience entails that "I am not in front of my body, I am in it, or rather I am it" (*Phenomenology* 173). The body is not something you inhabit or wear; it is *what you are*.¹⁴⁹ Even if this inevitably brings with it a physically limited point of view – we cannot ever see our whole body but always perceive it from a certain angle – we make up a *body schema* that works as a map covering all our limbs and that we use to orient ourselves. After considering several characterizations of this particular schema, he lastly described it as "a way of stating that my body is in-the-world. As far as spatiality is concerned...one's own body is the third term, always tacitly understood, in the figure-background structure, and every figure stands out against the double horizon of external and bodily space" (*Phenomenology* 115). We see strong echoes of this understanding of how we inhabit the body in Salamon's formulation of the felt sense of the body as the unspoken basis for subjectivity. We may also draw a connection to Freud's formulation of the bodily ego and Anzieu's more specific skin ego. All three – bodily ego, skin ego, and body schema – emphasize subjectivity as

¹⁴⁹ This understanding of the body is complicated by the narratives of transsexuals that Prosser charts in *Second Skins*, where the body becomes a container (and the wrong one at that) that the self longs to change or get out of.

originating in our material composition and the crucial role it plays in how we relate to the world around us.

Merleau-Ponty thus moves from a concept of bodily spatiality that focuses on the concretization of movement into sense images, to the state we have earlier described as being-in-the-world, in which the body acts as our anchor in the general framework enveloping our individual situations. Esther's anchor, her being-in-the-world, is thrown off course by the detachment she feels from her limbs (the leg in the accident and the arm at the business dinner). Towards the end of the film, this becomes evident not only in her actions but in how the film portrays her very proprioception. In the sequence in question Esther goes to the shops one morning, seemingly on her way to work. Suddenly her/our vision becomes blurry: the camera cuts between unclear, swimming images from Esther's point of view, and clearer reverse shots at her rubbing her eyes, stumbling. Contours of people and things become more and more unclear, and the speed of the film momentarily increases. Esther has to lean on objects and walls in order not to lose balance. The speed slows down and we get a close-up of her face looking around, alarmed and confused.

Through these techniques, the film brings us into Esther's proprioception and lets us see the world through her eyes. Even when we switch to reverse shots of Esther, they are brief and do not successfully reestablish a stable point of view for the audience.¹⁵⁰ The sudden lack of focus and ability to navigate the world in her body points to the rupture in Esther's phenomenological embodiment: the sense images that

¹⁵⁰ There is an argument waiting to be made about how these techniques posit the film as a proprioceptive entity in itself, *pace* Sobchack (1992; 2004).

make up her body schema (or bodily ego) are not in sync. Her lack of wholeness disorients her and makes it difficult for her body to act as the anchor that being-in-the-world presupposes.¹⁵¹

In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty refashioned this understanding of being-in-the world and expressed the understanding that the problems central to *The Phenomenology of Perception* were in fact insoluble because he had started with a distinction between consciousness and its object (*Visible* 200). This already establishes a structure with a perceiving subject and a perceivable object while he in fact wanted to understand the self "not as nothingness, not as something, but as the unity by transgression or by correlative encroachment of 'thing' and 'world'" (ibid.). Using words such as transgression and encroachment signals the type of process involved in forming the self. It is not a combination or addition of different aspects but rather an invasive, transgressive movement between body and world that connects them and makes them into a unity. "Flesh" is the term he chooses to denote the element that connects us with the world in one motion of touching and seeing. He describes this motion as

¹⁵¹ According to Merleau-Ponty, we take our bodies as the first point of reference in every spatial situation, which means that our experience of spatiality is not so much a case of putting our body in a position relating to positions of other objects, but rather "the laying down of the first co-ordinates, the anchoring of the active body in an object, the situation of the body in face of its tasks" (*Phenomenology* 115). This makes us able to interact with other subjects and objects without seeing ourselves from the outside, marveling at the way our bodies move exactly the way they need to. Every time my body's intentionality is directed towards an object, there is no conscious telling the body which actions to employ; the body has already outlined the possible alternative courses of action it could take and decides which one to use without my consciousness following every step of the action. The various parts of my body co-operate without my fully being consciously aware of it.

the coiling over of the visible upon the seeing body, of the tangible upon the touching body, which is attested in particular when the body sees itself, touches itself seeing and touching the things, such that, simultaneously, *as* tangible it descends among them, *as* touching it dominates them all and draws this relationship and even this double relationship from itself, by dehiscence or fission of its own mass. (*Visible* 146).

Here, flesh does not merely give us coordinates with which we may then orient ourselves in the world; it is rather a continuum of instances of perception. There is a two-way, tangible and tactile relationship between the body and the world, taking place in the sphere of flesh. The reversible character of flesh also means that the body has a double reference: it is *both* subject and object, as opposed to the subject intentionally reaching out for an object. We may see the last hotel scene when Esther is surveying photographs of herself while simultaneously working intently on breaking into her body as beginning to address this duality. In the scene, photographs of cut and bloody body parts are spread out over a table in Esther's room, documenting her forays under the skin and into her body. The photographs represent her body to herself, as mementos (in a less tactile but more durable way than the skin she kept in her wallet) but the photographs can also be read as attempts to see her entire body and the marks she makes on it.

The tangible and tactile relationship between body and world not only refers to the body as subject and object but also to the double sensation of touching and being touched. This brings us back to psychoanalysis and the properties of skin. The reversibility of this relationship appears in *The Ego and the Id*, in which Freud writes, "[A] person's own body, and above all its surface, is a place from which both external

and internal perceptions may spring. It is *seen* like any other object, but to the *touch* it yields two kinds of sensations, one of which may be equivalent to an internal perception" (19). Similarly, Anzieu writes that "[T]he tactile in fact provides both an 'internal' and an 'external' perception. Freud alludes to the fact that I feel the object touching my skin at the same time as I feel my skin touched by the object" (*Skin Ego* 85). For Anzieu, the importance of this is again the double touch's influence on subjectivity. He writes, "it seems likely that the doubling that is inherent in tactile sensations prepares the ground for the reflexive doubling of the conscious Ego, once again basing itself anaclitically upon tactile experience" (ibid.). In other words, the reversible relationship taking place at the body's surface, the internal and external feeling of touch, is crucial to the development of the ego.

In Merleau-Ponty's work, this reversibility is always only imminent and can never be entirely realized in fact. Just as we can never see our whole body, we can never fully feel the totality of our bodies: the moment always dissolves at the moment of touching. If my one hand touches the other while the other touches something else (the example from *Phenomenology* that Merleau-Ponty recalls in *Visible*), the hands can never fully touch and be touched simultaneously. Even as my hands are engaged in a reversible feeling motion, our thoughts still have to jump from hand to hand to describe this feeling and so our use of language links the two hands inextricably together, but still as *two hands*. There is always a gap in this experience that forecloses a feeling of totality.

If we at this point recall the initial questions I asked in the beginning of the chapter, namely what it means to be in one's skin and how skin works as a defining feature of subjectivity, we see that we can never be entirely, totally in our skin; there will always be a measure of strangeness, a gap, between the touching and the touched. Through her bodily incursions, Esther addresses this gap and arguably tries to close it by extending touch to self-consumption. Without giving us any final resolution to the tension between Cartesian and psychical corporeality, *In My Skin* explores what it might mean to respond to the body's own language, and takes tooth to skin as a way to discover non-Cartesian, fleshly embodiment.

CODA: Remains

Knowledge constitution and the body are intimately entwined. Anzieu claims that "[S]ince the Renaissance, Western thought has been obsessed with a particular epistemological conception, whereby the acquisition of knowledge is seen as a process of breaking through an outer shell to reach an inner core or nucleus" (9). In this model, which originates especially from the medical field of anatomy and dissection, knowledge is perceived to rest at our corporeal center, the body's truth hiding inside it.

The desire to open up the body to learn its secrets helped constitute the project of mapping the body according to its perceived normality and corresponding abnormality. However, the categories of normal and abnormal are external in character, appearing during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when flesh was at the center of a new statistical effort to map the human body. In contrast to this seemingly general, unmarked knowledge of the body, the knowledge generated by embodied subjectivities, such as, for example, Olympia in *Geek Love*, is based on the body's experience of what Braidotti calls an overlap between "the physical, the symbolic, and the sociological" (25). The categories of normality and abnormality are part of how Olympia experiences her embodiment, but ultimately remain external to her felt sense of the body.

The knowledge Esther seeks in *In My Skin* echoes the search for truth performed in dissections 150 years earlier, as they are both based on opening up the skin envelope to look inside. Yet Esther's search is not for disembodied, "objective" truth but for a knowledge that will connect her flesh to the flesh of the world and mend the Cartesian split. In her actions, we read not a search for a core but rather a recognition of the paradox that our "centre is situated at the periphery" (Anzieu 9). The secret core of the body and subjectivity is not inside us but all around us.

The search for internal, corporeal truth is made all the more futile by the fact that the body part our society is currently investing with the promise of telling us "who we are" – the brain – is made up of the same material as our skin, the ectoderm (Benthien 7).¹⁵² If the organ overwhelmingly associated with thought is of the same matter as the tactile, haptic surface connecting us both to our insides and the outside, we must reconceptualize the geography of our psychic corporeality. Furthermore, we need to reevaluate how we conceive of the role of our embodiment in the knowledge we have of ourselves and the world around us.

By dispensing with the center/periphery model, the stage is set for conceptualizing embodiment and embodied knowledge in less linear and more multivalent ways. Despite our daily, lived experience of embodied subjectivity, however, divesting our vocabulary of binaries like inside/outside and mind/body

¹⁵² In his investigation of embodied consciousness, the philosopher Alva Noë insists that "you are not your brain" (7). In a way he is correct – we are not our brains in the meaning of disembodied, Cartesian consciousness – yet if we take neurobiological findings on the ectoderm in skin and the brain into account, we must conclude that we *are* in fact our brains, if only since our brains are us.

takes time. Fashioning new critical vocabularies that are not circumscribed by Cartesian dualism is an ongoing project. It may bring momentary affective and epistemological disorientation, but it also promises to give fleshly embodiment the primacy it deserves.

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