

*Telling tales, allowing the body to speak: redefining the art of flesh in feminist  
performance art*

By: Morwenna Bronwyn Bosch

Submitted in fulfilment of the academic requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in  
the Discipline of Drama and Performance Studies, School of Literary Studies, Media and  
Creative Arts

University of KwaZulu Natal

Pietermaritzburg 2006

*The financial assistance of the National Research Foundation (NRF) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the NRF.*

## **Abstract**

This thesis is constructed between a double argument. The first is a feminist argument that the female body may be viewed as a tool for cultural reinscription against dominant structures of subjectivity and representation that have rendered women the common flesh of art, without recourse to their own representational economy. Secondly, it is argued that the female body can never be recuperated as an essential, original form. That is, there is no essential female body or nature to be represented. In this sense, the body is artificial, or not *natural*, and so can be re-presented, specifically in feminist performance art, in order to rework radically the relationship between language, subjectivity and desire. The research undertaken is genealogical and also looks towards the future: deconstructing the historical imperatives that have produced 'the female body' and suggesting ways in which feminist performance art may redefine the ways in which female flesh is represented.

## Introduction

The fundamental premise of this research is the contention that the body is a heavily contested site of struggle over identity, language and power. The body is never a neutral, pre-discursive entity insofar as it is produced by the discourse that identifies it as such. One, if not *the*, regulatory ideal that inscribes the body is gender. The mastering division that produces gender difference in the Western imaginary is the hierarchical split between the male and female body, masculine and feminine. Thus, part of the rationale behind this project is the deconstruction of a cultural genealogy whereby masculine subjectivity has been discursively privileged in structures of language, desire and knowledge production; theatrical representation being a mode of aesthetic knowledge production.

I argue that the development of modern patriarchies has set a precedent for the negative interpretation of female biology and psychic life and has hence set in motion the production of a dominant morphological imaginary that functions in terms of antagonistic dualisms between a positive masculine subject and a negated, lacking feminine subject. The privileged phallogocentric individual, then, is constituted not in relation to a shared *community* of others but *in opposition* to the other, which is primarily the negative sign 'woman'. However, I want to move the argument beyond substitution, for I do not think that displacing a masculine morphological imaginary with an essential feminine one will disarm structures of domination and hierarchy.

My premises are conditioned by the view that if the body, as Grosz (1995:26) states, "...is an un- or inadequately acknowledged condition of knowledges, then the sexual specificity of bodies must be a relevant factor in the evaluation of these knowledges". Converse to Grosz's speculation is that the body can *produce* a bodily writing in time and space that, specifically for feminist performance artists, does not reproduce the structures of language and desire mandated by phallogocentric frameworks but seeks to transgress these structures. That is, the body can be used in performance to disrupt and expose sedimentations of the 'female body', 'telling tales' as it were, so as to expose the historical imperatives that render the female body negative 'other'.

I have a double focus in this thesis, so that the first three chapters are weighted with theoretical arguments that frame my understanding of the terms 'the female body' and

'performance art'. The latter three chapters focus in detail upon the work of feminist performance artists and draw upon the arguments and contexts of Focus 1.1 have chosen to divide the thesis into foci and not sections as the idea of dissection between theory and practice does not serve my purpose: each focus is partial, and supportive of the other.

In Focus 1, Chapter One, I turn to issues of identity and subjectivity in which I interrogate the doctrine of individualism and female embodiment, specifically through the trope of skin. The idea of skin is compelling as throughout modernity it has functioned as a subjective interface. In the technocratic postmodern era, the interface of skin and the boundaries of the subject are being radically altered by virtual and mechanical technologies. The definitions and borders of the gendered subject are also being transgressed, and it is the outmoded, silent and passive feminine body that feminist performance artists attempt to reimagine, destroy and remake specifically through transgressing the constitutive borderline of skin. I consider psychoanalytic theory and several psychoanalytic theorists as a tool for deconstructing and re-imagining the subject beyond the identificatory surfaces (the skin) of the phallic premise and indeed for shifting the relation of dual fear and fascination for the other.

Chapter Two delves further into the historical ontology of the privileged masculine subject and representative technologies underpinned by the dominance of 'time' over 'space'. It will be seen that the instrumentalism ascribed to the concept of time and the contingent masculine subject has produced a female body associated with passive containment and disorganised corporeality. This has in effect reproduced the female body as a spatialised object in opposition to the authorial position of the rational masculine subject associated with *logos* and *telos* and has produced a western cultural standard whereby women have been precluded from aesthetic contribution.

In Chapter Three I turn to consider the way in which the canonical structure reiterates the privilege of the masculine subject (in the form of the artistic genius) and the negation of sexual difference. I argue that the displacement of cultural contributions by women by the figure of the masculine artistic genius or *auteur* is symptomatic of the intolerance of a monological imaginary of difference and is moreover a means of allying castration anxiety and a fear of the maternal. I also review several feminist strategies in challenging the canon and the emergence of feminist performance art as a distinctly anti-canonical form.

The performance artists whose work I analyse in Chapters Four and Five- Orlan and Annie Sprinkle respectively- are perhaps two of the most radical feminist performance artists to date in terms of their unflagging use of their own bodies in performance. Orlan is known best for her *interventions*, or surgical performances. However, it is important to view the *interventions* in the context of other work, for it will be seen that she has developed her use of the body and the skin specifically to reject institutionalised subjectivity and cultural standards. I argue that the cut in Orlan's skin is a performative cut into language: as the body's surface is changed, from the inside out, Orlan destroys the subject of paternal origins and the linguistic precedent of the sign 'woman'.

Whereas Orlan was trained in a fine art tradition, Annie Sprinkle entered professional performance art from the subculture of pornography, prostitution and burlesque strip tease. In Chapter Five, I discuss how Sprinkle's use of the explicit and the obscene body in her performance art practice transgresses radically standards of feminine decorum and then represents the female body- object of fear and fascination- for recuperation in the public domain without appeal to traditional theatrical, biomedical, or pornographic viewing frameworks. I also make a link between the prostitute body as an imaginary site for cultural detritus and the discursive construction of the 'savage' female body.

In Chapter Six, the 'savage' female body returns in a discussion of the construction of the non-white female body, that is, the re-marking of bodies in terms of skin colour, specifically in South Africa. I go back to psychoanalytic discourse and interrogate its application to the post-colonial subject, particularly in terms of the project of re-imagining the othered body as a site for narrative and articulation. I then turn my attention to the discursive construction of the female 'body-African', which contextualises the work of Tracey Rose and Berni Searle respectively. For both artists, the body is central to their interrogations of race and racialised thinking, from which issues of gender cannot be divorced.

## Contents

### Focus One: Framework

#### Chapter One: Skin: between surface and interior

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 Skin</b>	<b>2</b>
1.1 .i The imaginary body: identity and subjectivity	3
1.1 .ii The imaginary female body	6
<b>1.2 The myth of sex: psychoanalytic theory and sexual difference</b>	<b>8</b>
1.2.i The Oedipal myth: Freud's psychosexual morphology	9
1.2.ii Lacan: language and subjectivity	10
1.2.iii Anzieu's skin ego	13
<b>1.2 Feminist Interventions</b>	<b>15</b>
1.3.i Irigaray: a female psychic morphology?	15
1.3.ii Kristeva: the semiotic chora	18
1.3.iii Judith Butler: queering the phallus	22
<b>1.3 Reading flesh art against the phallus</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>30</b>

#### Chapter Two: Mapping Silence: disruptions of time, space and place

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>2.1 The female body as space: a (concise) genealogy</b>	<b>33</b>
2.1.i Plato's <i>chora</i>	34
2.1.ii Madonna/whore	35
2.1 .iii The spatial modalities of psychoanalysis	37

<b>2.2 Women as Biomedical space</b>	<b>38</b>
2.2.i Mapping the Biomedical body	40
2.2.ii Being and Becoming	41
<b>2.3 Women's Space: home-bodies</b>	<b>44</b>
2.3.i Doubling up the domestic body	45
<b>2.4 Bodies in Space</b>	<b>47</b>
2.4.i Body-object	48
2.4.ii Surveillance and control	49
2.4.iii Towards a critical mimesis	50
<b>2.5 A (concise) historical overview of theatre space as gendered space</b>	<b>51</b>
2.5.i Shifting theatrical space	54
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>58</b>
 <b>Chapter Three: A phallus by another name: the canon</b>	
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>3.1 A definition of 'the canon'</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>3.2 Critiquing the canon</b>	<b>64</b>
3.2.i Feminisms and the canon	65
<b>3.3 The textual maternal or reproducing the other as the same</b>	<b>70</b>
3.3.i Reading for the maternal: the lost mother	71
3.3.ii <i>Differance</i> , difference, and desire	73
<b>3.4 Performance art</b>	<b>77</b>
3.4.i Feminist performance art	79
3.4.ii Theorising feminist performance art	82
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>83</b>

**Focus Two: Performance**

**Chapter Four: Flesh made Word: the Incarnation of St Orlan**

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>4.1 Orlan gives birth to her loved self: formative performances</b>	<b>86</b>
4.1 .i A society of mothers and whores	88
4.1 .ii Measuring up: <i>MesuRAGES</i>	91
4.1 .iii Creative genius and taboo: <i>A poil/sans poil</i>	95
4.1.iv Monstrous body: <i>The Head of the Medusa</i>	96
<b>4.2 The iconography of St Orlan</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>4.3 The body opened: the Reincarnation of St Orlan</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>4.3.i Operation Orlan</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>4.4 Omnipresence: the making of a woman-to-woman transsexual</b>	<b>112</b>
4.4.i Woman to woman	114
4.4.ii Audience	117
4.4.iii The body is obsolete	119
<b>4.5 Magic and manipulation: recent works</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>121</b>

**Chapter Five: Post Porn Modernism: performing the whore in the art of Annie Sprinkle**

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>5.1 Representation, resistance and transgression</b>	<b>130</b>
5.1.i Skin flicks	132
5.1 .ii Feminism and pornography: an uneasy alliance	134
5.1.iii Strip Speak	137

<b>5.2 Transgression: crossing the porn/art divide</b>	<b>141</b>
5.2.i Private/public, woman/whore	144
5.2.ii The Prometheus Project	146
<b>5.3 Post Porn Modernist</b>	<b>148</b>
5.3.i Shifting perspectives: sex, art and AIDS	149
5.3.ii After Olympia, Post Porn Modernist	150
5.3.iii Post Porn Modernism	152
5.3.iv The limits of taste in <i>Post Pom Modernist</i>	154
<b>5.4 Life-art- <i>Seven Years of Love as Art</i></b>	<b>160</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>161</b>

**Chapter Six: Bringing the Body Home: the problems and possibilities of feminist performance art in South Africa**

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>6.1 Revisiting psychoanalysis</b>	<b>174</b>
6.1.i A question of representation	176
<b>6.2 Staging Africans</b>	<b>179</b>
<b>6.3 <i>Love me/fuck me</i>: Tracey Rose</b>	<b>184</b>
<b>6.4 Recolouring the body: Berni Searle</b>	<b>193</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>201</b>
<b>Conclusions and recommendations for further research</b>	<b>204</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>208</b>

## List of Illustrations

Fig. 1 Illustration in a midwifery manual	59
Fig. 2 Anatomical painting	59
Fig. 3 <i>Le Baiser</i>	88
Fig. 4 <i>Omnipresence</i> : Video screen	111
Fig. 5 <i>Omnipresence</i> : second mouth	112
Fig. 6 <i>Omnipresence</i> : reading	114
Fig. 7 <i>Omnipresence</i> : operation	114
Fig. 8 <i>Omnipresence</i>	114
Fig. 9 Bandaged face	117
Fig. 10 Post operative	117
Fig. 11 Self hybridisation	122
Fig. 12 <i>Woman with Head</i>	122
Fig. 13 <i>MesuRAGES</i>	123
Fig. 14 St Orlan	124
Fig. 15 St Orlan	124
Fig. 16 <i>Successful Operation</i>	125
Fig. 17 <i>The Cloak of Harlequin</i>	126
Fig. 18 <i>Omnipresence</i>	127
Fig. 19 <i>Omnipresence</i> recovery	128
Fig. 20 <i>Bosom Ballet</i>	157
Fig. 21 <i>Strip Speak</i>	163
Fig. 22 <i>Strip Speak</i> : demonstration	163
Fig. 23 <i>Strip Speak</i> : tampon string	164
Fig. 24 <i>Pornstistics</i>	165
Fig. 25 Transformation Salon	166
Fig. 26 <i>100 Blow Jobs</i>	167
Fig. 27 Onstage douche	168
Fig. 28 <i>Public Cervix Announcement</i>	169
Fig. 29 Audience	169
Fig. 30 Sprinkle and Stevens	170
Fig. 31 Caricature of Saartjie Baartman	184
Fig. 32 <i>The Kiss</i>	186

Fig. 33 <i>Span II</i>	187
Fig. 34 <i>Span II</i>	187
Fig. 35,36,37 Figures from <i>Ciao Bella</i>	193
Fig. 38 <i>Looking Back</i>	195
Fig. 39 <i>Snow White</i> : video stills	198
Fig. 40 <i>Home and Away</i> : video stills	201
Fig. 41 <i>Waiting No. 4</i>	203
Fig. 42 <i>Waiting No. 5</i>	203

## Chapter One

### Skin: between surface and interior

#### Introduction

In Chapter One, I use skin as a trope for discussing the production of subjectivity. Skin is viewed as the mediating surface upon which identity is inscribed and the mediating surface that enables the subject to move between the material and the imaginary. My overarching argument in this Chapter is that the disruption of the exclusive dichotomy between surface (skin) and interior (flesh) is a transgressive strategy for feminist performance artists. I will discuss how the sexual specificity of the female body-female skin, as it were, precludes women from speaking as full and proper (thus closed) subjects within the dominant phallogentric symbolic. However, I will argue that women's difference does not indicate a lacking subject but points towards the possibility of rethinking radically the subject entrenched and intelligible in terms of exclusive dualisms between, for example, surface/interior, female/male, mind/body.

I situate my argument within an initial discussion of the concept of identity and how the imaginary and the material are interrelated to produce particular identities. I push for rethinking identity *through* skin, that is, working within a dual praxis of imaginary and material, which is what feminist performance artists engage with in their turn to flesh as a theatrical medium. I go on to outline canonical psychoanalytic accounts of psychic morphology and then consider some feminist reappropriations and critiques of the phallic imaginary. These feminist critiques, although they differ from each other, suggest ways in which a dominant masculine symbolic renders sexual difference unintelligible.

The discussion of psychoanalytic theory lays important groundwork for understanding developments in contemporary thinking on identity and especially for locating performance theory as a significant epistemological shift and development in cultural analysis. Throughout the chapter, I link the concept of psychic morphology to the thematic and ideological concerns of female performance artists. Finally, I argue that feminist performance artists who work with their skin as a medium are engaged in the act of re-working, re-marking and reconstituting the dominant symbolic so as to displace the

phallic imaginary from an exclusive centre of cultural production that renders the female body castrated and silent.

## 1.1 Skin

The skin is the largest bodily organ. Skin forms the interface between bodies and worlds, it is the site where identity is mapped out in terms of cultural identifications and markings upon the surface of the body. Skin is constituted as a mediating boundary that identifies. The exclusion of a perceived interior and exterior is in fact a structuring principle of identity, for identity is by definition the distinction of self from other, interior from exterior, subject from object. Skin as a mediating surface or membrane between an interior and exterior is, as I will discuss in terms of psychoanalytic accounts of psycho-sexual development, the primary scene for subject formation. Skin is constituted as a surface upon which an imaginary interior or essence can take *place*, a place where identity is marked or inscribed.

The subject that is produced through the constant social re-marking or naming of the body's surface through language is never gender neutral. Thus, skin is encoded with predetermined markers of gender and race in particular. However, skin lacks depth and interiority. Thus, identity cannot be located nor fixed in skin. This is a positive concept for feminists who want to shift historical inscriptions of womanhood. Firstly, we can rework the pervasive western ontology that privileges a doctrine of sovereign individuality which in turn supports the notion of an essential, interior essence. As I will discuss, this ontology has set a historical precedent for investigating and violating the bodies of othered subject (the 'other' in this study is specifically, though not exclusively, female). Secondly, viewing the skin as a mediating surface rather than the site of skin-tight *identity* supports the contention by performance theorists (see Auslander 1997, Phelan 1993) that subjectivity is constantly performed and negotiated.

The feminist performance artists who practice the politics of flesh, so to speak, use skin as a reflexive tool with which, in which and upon which they deconstruct and

<sup>1</sup> The sense in which I use the term 'identity' refers to equivalence or the economy of the same that is produced via the negation of difference.

reinscribe the dominant, phallic symbolic. From the outset of this thesis, I want to bear in mind that if, women are able to reimagine their bodies culturally, linguistically and sexually by having access to cultural authorship (in this case, via performance art), they might then begin to dismantle the phallic imperative that reproduces the female body in dominant representational economies. As I will argue, the phallic symbolic economy does not enable women to make a significant and critical contribution to its production, in short, it is a system that is unrepresentative for women.

It will be seen that the turn to the pliable stuff of *skin* as a tool for the construction of a symbolic that does not erase the bodies and contributions of the other, allows for a more flexible notion of identity precisely because it does not rely upon the exclusive dualism of the phallogocentric symbolic. Working with skin as a performance medium engages the site of difference, that is, the mediating threshold between identity and non-identity, being and becoming.

#### 1.1.i The imaginary body: identity and subjectivity

In order to explain the significance of skin as a surface of social inscription, it is necessary to elaborate on the psychic incorporation of skin in the imaginary. In other words, how does skin, constituted as a surface and a boundary, allow the subject to be produced? Let me draw an important distinction between subjectivity and identity before I continue: the *subject* is located within a matrix of power, knowledge and pleasure. Hence, the subject is positioned within historically contingent power structures. *Identity* is the marking of the subject position upon the surface of the body. Whilst identity can be temporarily secured through visible external manifestation and appearance, subjectivity remains "...elusive, fragmentary, ephemeral and contingent" (Perry 2004:145). So then, I may be identified as female by appeal to biological markers but the way in which I perform my subjectivity is historically and socially contingent. I draw attention to the distinction between identity/subjectivity because, if subjectivity is viewed as mobile, then the body can be used as a tool for reformulating identity and indeed transgressing the social rules and borderlines that mark identity. The body as a tool for transgression is vital to the understanding of feminist performance art, but let me first contextualise the use of the body in performance art by looking at the significant (gendered) relationship between the

material and the imaginary body or the relationship between the word (the symbolic) and the flesh.

The imaginary body, that is, the imagined unified body that guarantees a fixed and stable identity, is not gender neutral. The material and the imaginary body are typically conflated as indicators of an innate gender identity. Kristeva (1982) contends that the imaginary female body within patriarchal structures is the quintessentially abject body. This abject body is comported into the real by phallogocentric discourse that marks the female body as lacking the closure that is necessary for the production of the individual or indivisible subject. The female body is thus associated with immanence and corporeality and the female subject is relegated to the space-off of the marginalised abject. Her body becomes a material base from which 'he', the universal male, can rise upwards to claim transcendent rationality in the public sphere of the citizen (Pritchard 1992). 'She', lacking specificity, can never be enveloped in a skin that is not already marked as *his* property'. Within these psychic structures, the female body becomes the space (more on the idea of the female body as space in Chapter Two) where the generative authority of the phallus, conflated with the penis, is reproduced and the patriarchal system reinstated. Female flesh thus becomes the residue or waste product of an autogenic patrilinear reproductive economy. Patriarchy, a generational social system, is defined by Irigaray (1991:16) as: "an exclusive respect for the genealogy of sons and fathers, and the competition between brothers". The reason that I have chosen to use Irigaray's definition of patriarchy is that she explains succinctly the mechanism whereby the female body and its contributions are negated in the very social structures that define them as such. Patrilinear genealogy systematically defaces the maternal bloodline and in so doing obliterates the possibility of sexual difference and hence, as I will show, a female speaking subject. Skin in this sense envelops the female body in relation to the transcendent position of an originating paternal authority, both in the sense of biological and cultural reproduction. It is maternal blood upon which life depends, it is maternal skin within which life begins, but it is the name or Word of the father and the word of the law (as an extension of paternal authority) that marks or orders the flesh-envelope of skin.

" *His* or *He* refers to the abstract universal masculine term and denotes the connection in phallogocentric structures between phallic authority, a masculine god, father, brother and husband. C/Irigaray 1991

If we understand skin as the primary site of our constitution as gendered subjects, then the way in which skin-identity is produced by its inculcation and struggles with power structures is important, particularly to a feminist deconstruction of the sedimented effects of gender constructs. Deconstructing the skin, and indeed the body in that skin, and its histories, at least in terms of a genealogical approach: "investigates the political stakes in designating as an origin and a cause those identity categories that are in fact the effects of institutions, practises, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin" (Butler 1990a:xi). Butler's statement is characterised by a radical theoretical stance in which she argues that nowhere can any identity category be assumed. In turn the category "woman" cannot be assumed as an origin or original copy. Gender in a western patriarchal context is unintelligible without reference to the categories of male/female. The reflexivity of the terms as I employ them indicates that (gender) identity is not considered the origin of itself. Rather, identities are constructed through material and ideological apparatus that inscribe skin with gendered meanings. In this vein, the signifier 'woman' can be viewed as being open to discrepancy, incongruity, and political struggle, that is, open to difference that is not equivalent to phallogomorphic discourse. Such a paradigm already challenges the limits of reasonable thought as 'reason' and 'logic' cannot withstand multiplicity or the transitive, reason functions via exclusion. Skin is a problematic concept for the discursive structures founded upon discrete and exclusive categories of reason because skin both shields and exposes the body, is watertight *and* porous. Skin acts as an interface between bodies and worlds (Ahmed and Stacey 2001). The third or transitive term (the interface) is untenable within systems of binary logic and so, within this logic, already constructed theoretical language "does not speak mucous [or pure difference]" (Irigaray 1991:113-114). The logic of theoretical language, in other words forecloses the *mediating* surface of skin by identifying the subject. According to Irigaray, exclusive or categorical knowledge is skin flayed from the body of the other:

[already constructed theoretical language] remains a remainder, producing delirium, dereliction, wounds, sometimes exhaustion, mucous deployed in this journey that is analysis, and which risks death if it is not resituated in its place. In that case, all thought becomes skin stripped from the other, speculation without roots or crown, feet or head, which devours-consumes the intimacy-interior, of the body that ensures the passage from lowest to highest... if the source is invisible, the

other can believe himself to be the source, reversing the site from which he receives himself (ibid, emphasis mine).

Irigaray's description of thought as *skin* that is *stripped* from the other reveals the ontological violence that is perpetuated by the rationalisation of bodies by a system of gendered exclusion and indeed categorical identities. A logic that systematically disavows the material in its production must suffer the entropy of its own limitations: not thinking difference is invested in nothing but a mute cadaverous body of knowledge.

### 1.1 .ii The imaginary female body

The imaginary female body is positioned at the limit of *reasonable* speech (that is, *judgemental* speech that is founded upon exclusive dualisms and categories) because the female subject (hardly a subject at all, as I will show) is relegated to the ontological realm of reproduction without generation, containment without place, deposition but not origin. Women have been tied to negative interpretations of their biological functions throughout the history of patriarchal domination, these 'functions' being conceived of as innate, necessary and dubious components of an essential feminine nature. The female body within the phallographic imaginary is considered duplicitous *by nature*, lacking the cohesion and singularity of the (masculine) body that belongs properly to culture. Female skin stretches to double up bodies in pregnancy and the skin of the outer body folds in to form the mucous membrane or double lips of the female sex, which extends to the cervix, womb and breasts (Irigaray 1991). Why the multiplicity of female reproductive organs and genitalia are inscribed as duplicitous can only be assumed to be symptomatic of a pervasive phallographic imaginary and incumbent discursive structures that institute misogyny. Irigaray (1991: 39) explains the institution of exclusive paternal generation at the cost of a maternal body as: "[the] exclusivity of his law forecloses this [maternal] first body, this first home, this first love". Furthermore, Irigaray argues that "[Paternal law] sacrifices [the maternal body] so as to make [that body] the material for the rule of language ...which privileges the masculine genre... to such an extent as to confuse it with the human race". Thus, the maternal body becomes no more than the place for a singular phallic reproductive economy to operate. The language of one body, one indivisible sex then orders discourse, preferring homogeneity and pushing the heterogenous aside. The inscription of the phallic mark on the skin of women marks these skins as property that

must be contained and bound. In this sense, words become a kind of costume of marked skin that encases the body. The maternal and the feminine are not identical with female bodies or the female subject. The body is always already other than one, the body' is always in a state of flux and process as the subject is constantly contested and remade. My argument is that the sexing of bodies is a matter of the in-between term of skin that is marked by dominant symbolic structures, that is, the structure of language.

Skin is the interface where the imaginary, the social and the private are juxtaposed. Butler (1990a: 136) states that:

If [the reality of the gendered body] is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of public and social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body, the gender border control that differentiates inner from outer, and so institutes the "integrity" of the subject.

Although the 'integrity of the subject' is shown by Butler to be a fabrication of an imagined, essential interiority or substance, what matters is not that there be any empirical claim to anatomical certainty (of sex, gender, race, class and so on) in the citation of identities, but "the production of a morphological imaginary" (Shildrick 2001: 160). The way in which a morphological imaginary is produced is a political question for feminists: the *phallogentric* morphological imaginary privileges the traces of masculine morphology in the symbolic. This results in the interplay of the imaginary and the biological in phallogentric discourse that in effect reproduces the female subject as lacking in her general constitution. Female biology refuses the discretion of a fixed and stable bodily boundary, which is taken to mean that that body is excessive to an originating identity. I do not imply that the male body does not leak fluids, excrete or shift shape and size. However, the ways in which female biology has been interpreted historically has sedimented a dominant view of the female subject as lacking closure, harmony and a discrete interior essence or soul. The phallus, arch symbol of patriarchal domination, is also what the female body lacks: she is at once excessive and deficient, threatening and passive. The (monstrous) female body returns in the imagination as an object of fascination and horror, and is in turn pathologised, medicalised and aestheticised. Consequently, women-centred discourses

have been overwritten and silenced through the production of pervasive masculinist discourses.

I have established that the female body cannot be recuperated culturally in terms of a phallic imaginary and contingent logic. Thus, within phallic-centred, patriarchal cultures, the bodies and contributions of women are secondary to the dominant and authoritative paternal word. Whilst female bloodlines are symbolically erased by exclusive patrilinear systems of descent (and in effect, women's histories are subordinated to the grand-paternal narrative), a lack of full and proper subjectivity also excludes women from the authoritative position of speaking subject. In order to discuss further the construction of imaginary *or psychic* subjectivity (and particularly psychic gender) I turn to psychoanalytic theory.

## **1.2 The myth of sex: psychoanalytic theory and sexual difference**

One of the most influential contemporary discourses that has been produced to explain the structure of the gendered subject is psychoanalytic theory. In section 1.2, I review the theories of Freud, Lacan and Anzieu and then counter the masculinist assumptions of their thinking on psychosexual development with the feminist perspectives of Irigaray, Kristeva and Butler respectively in section 1.3. Psychoanalysis offers a universal theory of the psychic construction of gender identity. Canonical psychoanalysis (of the Freudian school at least) has not shed a preoccupation with phallic/paternal power as a necessary condition for human sociality, and normalised psychic development remains within the bounds of the edifice of patriarchy. However, although psychoanalytic theory is a universalising theory, I argue that psychoanalysis is a useful discourse insofar as it enables the theorisation of the oscillating and dynamic relationship between interior and exterior, imaginary and material that produces subject positions and thus gendered subjects. My argument is underpinned by the idea that, if gender is unfixed and indeed *performative*, then perhaps the medium of performance art can be used as a particularly effective tool for dismantling the dominant symbolic and, through the use of flesh, reimagining and reinscribing the female body into culture.

### 1.2.L The Oedipal myth: Freud's psycho-sexual morphology

Sigmund Freud's account of the psycho-sexual acquisition of gender marks a radical break from biological determinism (Weedon 1997) in that he claimed that sex and sexual-social roles are not determined by biological functions that begin at puberty. Instead, he theorised that humans are sexual beings from birth and that the infant, whose sexual drives are undifferentiated and disorganised, thus experiences polymorphous or undifferentiated bodily pleasure. In the pre-Oedipal, 'phallic phase' (when the child, apparently, only recognises the penis and knows nothing of the vagina), children imagine the vagina to be a cloaca (that is, a sewer) which is both an anus and the place from whence babies come. Thus, "...the overwhelming force of the object (the mother, for example) is relegated to a cloaca, which is beneath our consideration or notice" (Gallop 1988:146). The male child becomes conscious of his difference when he sees his mother's genitalia and, seeing that she has no penis, assumes that she must have been castrated by the father. Fear of this supposed castration by the father causes the male child to reject the mother and fear his father and thus to defer the desire for a return to the initial undifferentiated bond with the maternal body onto other female bodies. The 'Oedipal crisis' is resolved when desire for the mother is repressed and deflected via exogamous heterosexual desire (Wallach Scott 1996). The female child, on the other hand, is supposedly disgusted by the sight of the mother's genitalia, which she identifies with her own, and desires the possession of the father's phallus. She, in turn, defers this penis envy to a later stage of development when she is ultimately satisfied by bearing a child as a phallic replacement. Meanwhile, female sexuality, "...or the erotic force and power of the object, is not recognised but rather consigned to the cloaca" (Gallop 1988:146). The phallic subject in Freud is exacted, then, at the cost of the abjected female genitalia.

Freud makes an explicit connection between the visibility of genitalia and the ordering of psychic gender. That is, the ordering of initial polymorphous sexuality is determined by genital sex. If the sexual drives are not ordered to correspond with given genitalia, then psycho-sexual abnormalities present in the adult. Thus, homosexuality and hysteria are considered the results of abnormal sexual development. Passive female heterosexuality and active male sexuality are the result of normal psycho-sexual development. For Freud, sexuality is the key to understanding the normalised social structure in which sex determines gender roles.

The Oedipal myth of gender acquisition in the Freudian account does not distinguish female from maternal, so that there is no space theorised for women to articulate desire or agency without deviating from the heterosexual imperative. That is, the imaginary female bod) is also a maternal body, at once desired and repulsive (as a figure of incest and castration). The privileging of the male gaze is also imperative in the Oedipal narrative, for the male child must learn to recognise the maternal body as a 'no' to his desire. The female child, on the other hand, understands her status as castrated and learns that she is the fetish to-be-seen. However, given that Freud premises the structuration of psychic realities upon symbolic corporealities, it could be argued that there are possible alternative symbolic structures that do not push the female subject into a psychic negativity wherein 'women inhabit a symbolic landscape that eliminates figures of women's eros' (Anderlini-D'Onofrio 1999:159). However, as will be shown, the essential 'space off of a feminine symbolic is also problematic.

The lack of a representational economy for women is precisely what Irigaray problematises (see section 1.3.i) and which female performance artists have begun to change by using the explicit body as a medium. However, we need to look further at the relationship of the body to language and the way in which the linguistic structure of the Symbolic relates to gendered power relations. Thus I move on to discuss Lacan's thinking on the linguistic ordering of the psyche.

### 1.2.ii Lacan: language and subjectivity

Lacan's theory of subject acquisition inherits from Freud the insistence upon masculine phallic supremacy but shifts from his predecessor's identification of anatomical difference as the basis of psychic gender to the role of language and the symbolic. In his reading of Freud, Lacan "...stresses the linguistic structure of the unconscious as a site of repressed meanings" (Weedon 1997:49-50). Subjectivity, for Lacan, is not determined by genitalia but is an imaginary structure that is inculcated in the processes of language acquisition and psycho-sexual development. According to Lacan, in the pre-linguistic, pre-Oedipal stages of infancy, the child is neither masculine nor feminine. During this initial imaginary stage, the child identifies with its 'mirror image'. The infant experiences pleasure from the imagined control that it has over its mirror image. In this instance of misrecognised unity,

the ego is split between the I who watches and the I who is watched. This misrecognition sets in motion a structure of subjectivity whereby the speaking subject is caught in the misrecognition of himself as the Other, that is, as the unified origin and author of his speech.'

Gender and the drives are organised as the subject resolves the Oedipal and castration complexes via entry into the symbolic order of language, laws and rules governing sociality. The unity that the infant imagines between its body and its image (which is really split between the one who does and its reflection) during the mirror phase is reproduced by the speaking subject who attempts to control desire, meaning and the law symbolically through the manipulation of signifiers. However, subjectivity is contingent upon the symbolic that precedes the subject. Desire is, for Lacan, what motivates speech. He who can satisfy desire can control meaning and *vice versa*. The satisfaction of desire, like meaning, is constantly deferred. The Other is the position of control of desire, power and meaning (Weedon 1997). Control of desire, power and meaning can never be obtained by the subject in the real, but because the subject misrecognises himself as the Other, he imagines he speaks as a unified individual. Whenever an individual takes up a subject position within language, the mechanisms of psychosexual development and the mirror phase come into play and the subject is invested in the imaginary Other. Language is thus invested with "...the massive psychic energy of the desire to control meaning" (Weedon 1997:50). The major problem for women comes in at this point: for Lacan, it is the mechanism of desire that prevents the final fixing of meaning in language, for nobody can *be* the Other. However, Lacan's thesis is that meaning and the symbolic order are organised around one, transcendental, fixed signifier: the phallus.

The symbolic phallus and the biological penis are not homologous, but there is certainly a masculinist bias that prevails here, for Lacan's model of subjectivity "[depends] on the crucial instance of castration, and [is] thus predicated exclusively on a male or masculine subject" (Willis 1990:254). Whilst nobody can actually possess the symbolic phallus that, as the privileged signifier, guarantees meaning/the satisfaction of desire, the production of the subject is nevertheless premised upon a process of Oedipalised libidinal displacements that privilege the male subject. Whilst nobody can actually *have* the phallus,

' Note that, in Lacanian algebra, *Afuture*] signifies the Other in the symbolic: *a[uttre]* the other in the imaginary.

the elision between penis/phallus is easy to make if not probable. That Lacan does not imagine an alternate, feminine symbolic in effect negates women's sexual specificity and means that women must address the phallus as the site where language and desire are generated and satisfied. The Oedipal narrative and the fixing of the symbolic phallus mean that as a woman, 'she' cannot enter the symbolic contract as anything other than a sign of lack. As a castrated being without a system of representation, the female body is rendered a conduit in dominant *homosexual* pathways of exchange.

In Lacan, power relations are determined by the symbolic order, which is a linguistically encoded system that is "internalised with the acquisition of language; and which Lacan sums up as the Name-of-the-Father" (1990:255). Patriarchy, organised under the name of the father, is inherent in Lacan's model of the symbolic. The possession or lack of a penis does not indicate sexual difference, but comes to *figure* difference in terms of a basic opposition (male/female). The female body is figured as a sign of lack and, lacking a signifier in the symbolic, becomes the blind spot in language for *she* has no purchase upon the symbolic economy of language-desire. Lacanian psychoanalysis reads the female body as lack and in so doing 'woman' exists only to reflect masculine subjectivity and desire. Given that genitalia do not *constitute* sexual difference in Lacan, but are figured as *markers* of difference, the following question could be considered: "is the relation of the sexes the quintessential *trompe Voie*" (Willis 1990:55). Thus, Lacan's fixing of the symbolic phallus as the privileged signifier can be seen to collapse his theory in a metaphysical argument that assumes that identity is biologically determined.

Willis (1990:55) argues that psychoanalysis is "...caught up in the ideological assignations of discourse, the structures of representation, narrative, vision, and meaning it seeks to analyse, reveal or bring to light". Moreover, Lacanian psychoanalysis is decidedly logocentric. The problem with the emphasis upon the rational province of *the word* (logos) is that this serves to negate the contributions of the maternal body to life: language comes to displace the maternal body which in turn dislodges women (who are mistakenly taken to be the same thing) from a positive place in the symbolic order. Why entry into the

<sup>4</sup> The double 'm' in '*homosexual*' indicates that heterosexuality is not, at its root, a relation between two different sexes. It is "an affair entirely to do with the man, and with the socially dominant fantasy of woman as a castrated being" (Tseelon 2001:96). Women's bodies in the homosexual circuit of exchange are property or conduits for the establishment and maintenance of male relations. Words are analogous media of exchange between masculine subjects.

symbolic must be premised upon the loss and negation of the maternal is, as far as I can see, an effect of the reification of the phallic generator that underpins the edifice of patriarchy.

Lacan has set the stage for dismantling the symbolic by identifying the relationship between the symbolic (language) and the constitution of the body of the subject. Hence, in performance art, it is imaginable that the female body may invoke a 'crossing back' to the imaginary mirror or 'critical mimesis' (Irigaray (1991), to be discussed further) so that speech does not always have to signify the loss and negation of the maternal or, indeed of the multiple, split subject. I will look at these possibilities in further detail in terms of discussions of Irigaray's thinking on critical feminist mimesis and Butler's theory of gender performativity, but firstly I turn to Anzieu's theory of the skin ego as a counter to Lacan's logocentrism.

### 1.2.iii Anzieu's skin ego

Lacan's revisions of Freud's bodily ego have clearly privileged language as the structuring principle of the psyche. Anzieu reviews Lacan's logocentric stance and repositions the body as critical to the process of ego formation. Anzieu argues for a return to a more Freudian, phenomenologically based account of the psychic structuring of the subject. He proposes a redefinition of the ego as a 'skin ego' (Tyler 2001:72). Anzieu takes the body's physical skin as the primary organ underlying the formation of the ego. The way in which skin is touched, held, and the way that we experience the feel of skin, for Anzieu, individualises psychic functioning and in effect, produces our identity. The skin ego is defined as the 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 psychic contents, on the basis of its experience of the surface of the body" (*ibid*). However, the unified image that the infant forms of itself is based upon how the surface of the body feels and is touched by the m/other, and not upon the imagined unity of itself and itself-as-Other.

Anzieu, like Freud, narrativises the process of ego acquisition in which a discrete identity is formed. In Anzieu's account, the pregnant woman and the mother are represented as the 'maternal environment' who is "so called because *it* surrounds the baby with an external envelope..." (*ibid*, emphasis mine). Already, this account has negative

ramifications for female subjectivity. The pregnant woman is constructed not as a subject but as a container, a sheath of skin. The narrative continues to explain that the maternal skin is the common skin that must be disavowed in order for the ego to be formed. As in Freud and Lacan, the maternal is disavowed and the female body, in an elision with the imaginary maternal, becomes the site of primary negativity or repression. The pregnant body is conflated with the maternal body, which in effect reduces female skin to the function of reproductive containment. The formation of a discrete identity is premised upon separation from and disavowal of the maternal skin and the contingent polymorphous pleasures of a skin that is not mapped by the laws of the symbolic. The surface of the subject's body, separated from the maternal skin, is divided into erogenous and socialised zones under the mark of the phallus. This process of ego formation is resolved, as in the Oedipal structure, through the loss and violent rejection of the maternal. Women are consequently once again pinned to a biologically determined non-identity. Female skin, elided with the maternal, is the very antithesis of 'one-ness' or separation and becomes the 'problematic' site of imagined plenitude and reproductive duplicity. Only men, by virtue of their indivisibility, can claim individuality.

That female skin be circumscribed by negative repression seems, to me, necessary only insofar as patriarchy identifies the maternal as a threat to phallic omnipotence. However, drawing upon Anzieu's thinking on the skin ego, the idea of *skin* instead of genitalia as a site of sexual difference is potentially productive for rethinking identity. To conceive of the image/ego as being formed by tactile experience points to the possibility of disrupting the primacy of genitalised difference in the production of sexual difference. This opens up a much broader field of possibilities in the discourse of identity and the structures of visibility and pleasure instituted in dominant representational economies, in which feminist performance art intervenes. Indeed, it must be asked whether the ego and identity as they are presently conceived in phallogentric western doctrine are a necessary condition for the intelligibility of sex and gender or whether these are the effects of the discourse that psychoanalysis seeks to uncover. As we shall see in the following section, some feminists have questioned the contingency of 'identity' with the structures of a dominant masculine imaginary. Their arguments support my contention that identity needs to be rethought *through* the skin, that is, not as a structure that is based upon the exclusion of the mediating surface of skin and instated in divisive and exclusive truisms about 'human nature\*.

### 1.3 Feminist interventions

Feminist theory and psychoanalysis have not been mutually exclusive disciplines, although perhaps at odds. Feminist theorists, particularly the poststructuralist theorist (Butler) that I have included in the following section, in reading against the metaphysical undertones of masculinist psychoanalytic theory, have taken up the notion of a radically unstable subject and thus consider the possibility of shifting the psychic and symbolic construction of gender. The instability of the subject inherent in psychoanalytic theory implies that the unitary subject is produced through a series of repressive and even punitive disciplinary acts that in fact produce the effect of identity. I turn to the work of Irigaray, Kristeva and Butler respectively in order to interrogate the assumptions of canonical psychoanalytic theory and decentre the phallic symbolic.

#### 1.3.i Irigaray: a female psychic morphology?

Irigaray's recuperation of Lacanian psychoanalysis critiques the repressive effect of construing psycho-sexual development as ordered by the law of the phallus. Irigaray argues that "...[t]he exploitation of women is based upon sexual difference, and can only be resolved through sexual difference" (Irigaray 1991:32). For Irigaray, there is no term of comparison between male and female: for women to claim equality with men is to collapse the argument back into the binary categories of the oppressor.

As has been discussed in section 1.2, sexual difference as it is conceived within Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis privileges the Oedipal myth and the overarching authority of the father as the founding structure of the phallographic imaginary. Within this structure of sexual difference, the maternal body is viewed as the major sexual and social taboo. Irigaray claims that in Freud's description of the murder of the father in the Oedipal myth, he forgets "a more archaic murder, that of the mother, necessitated by the establishment of a certain order in the polis". Irigaray cites the murder of Clytemnestra by her son, Orestes (in Aeschylus's *The Oresteia*) as the myth that precedes the Oedipal murder whereby phallic order is instituted at the cost of the mother. Irigaray goes on to theorise that the bias of the Oedipal myth regulates the discourse of psychoanalysis so that the establishment of phallic/ masculine authority is normalised. She states that the murder of the mother results in "...the non-punishment of the son, the burial of the madness of

women— and the burial of women in madness—and the advent of the virgin-goddess, born of the father and obedient to his law in forsaking the mother" (Irigaray 1991:37-38)."<sup>\*</sup>

So, Irigaray's primary criticism of the Oedipal myth which, according to Freud, is the founding narrative of sexuality is not so much the choice of myth but the ubiquity of patriarchy with obscuring the trace of our common maternal-blood origins that precedes entry into the symbolic. The violent negation of the maternal bloodline also defaces the possibility of the dissemination of a mode of gynocentric symbolic exchange: phallographic linguistic structures, Irigaray contends, are derived from a masculine libido which, according to her, is fundamentally different from a female libido. Irigaray (1985a, 1985b, 1991) views the female libido, like the female sex, as heterogenous, which is a fundamentally different account to the dominant psychoanalytic model. Mature, normalised masculine pleasure, at least within the Freudian model, is interpreted as being centred around one organ, the penis. In these terms, the normal development of female sexuality results in female sexual pleasure moving from active clitoral arousal to passive vaginal intercourse (with a male). Irigaray's theory challenges Freud's version of normal female sexuality by returning multiple pleasure to the surfaces of the body. She also links pleasure and desire to language, but does not fix the linguistic structure to Lacan's symbolic phallus. Instead, Irigaray states that: "We have to discover a language which does not replace the bodily encounter, as paternal language attempts to do, but which can go along with it, words which do not bar the corporeal, but which speak corporeal" (Irigaray 1991:43). The "bodily encounter" to which Irigaray refers is pre-Oedipal life with the mother *in utero*, prior to the divisive effects of naming and language. Language and order is instituted at the cost of "this first body, this first home, this first love" (Irigaray 1991:39), which is really, for Irigaray, the loss of *jouissance* or undifferentiated pleasure. The mother is symbolically and silently murdered so that the maternal body becomes the material condition for "the rule of language [*langue*] which privileges the masculine genre [*le genre masculin*] to such an extent as to confuse it with the human race [*le genre humain*]" (*ibid*). The abstract universals of 'human', 'mankind', 'person' are thus revealed to be premised upon a normalised masculine standard whereas discourse is in fact *sexuate* or gendered.

<sup>\*</sup> Irigaray states that Orestes is not punished for his mother's murder, but he is plagued by the Furies who pursue him relentlessly. However, I assume that Irigaray means that Orestes is not punished within the symbolic contract, that is, the law, nor by the symbolic castration that is visited upon the female body.

Irigaray does not claim that the female body or libido is in any way *pre-linguistic*, but rather that the model of femininity that is instituted by phallogocentric, patriarchal structures belongs to the rules and laws devised by masculine subjects. Language within the phallogocentric economy, like women's bodies, is a means of homosexual exchange. Sexual *indifference* operates within the trinitarian structure of subject, object and the suturing or copula instrument [the phallus] that allows the necessary singularity for enunciation. The phallogocentric structure of the masculine symbolic negates difference (the fluid, the interstitial, skin), it is a structure that demands identity. Irigaray's challenge to the monosexual imaginary, that does not allow women to articulate their bodies nor their desires, is to produce a positive language that speaks *mucous*, or the third term that will unsettle signification. Difference, then, is not the (in)different structure of the monosexual imaginary, but is the pure difference of heterogeneity.

Irigaray's work has been positioned as belonging to the school of *feminine ecriture*, and hence her writing has been seen as a distinctive call for the production of difference via women's writing. However, I think that we can view her position on text and textuality as labile and open to appropriation. Hence, I consider that feminist performance artists do in a sense produce a *genre feminin* in that they use the sexually specific body to reinscribe cultural spaces. This is in a sense a literal bodily writing. Of course it is difficult to claim that difference can be inscribed irrevocably in cultural spaces and texts, but I do think that Irigaray's thinking on a different morphological imaginary is useful insofar as it points out how women's bodies and experiences have been determined by masculine morphology, a privilege that is premised upon the negation of difference. Irigaray points out how the intolerance by the monological imaginary of difference results in an ontology of violent sexual repression and separatism; the logic of divide and rule in operation. She does not stipulate the ways in which feminists should go about finding the elsewhere of women's language, as the other is by any account essentially unlocateable. I do think that she lays a useful groundwork for feminist theorists that emphasises the political potential inherent in reworking the imaginary skin of femininity.

For Irigaray, like feminist performance artists, the core issue with the dominating phallogocentric imaginary is that of mimesis, or representation. So, for Irigaray, the mirror is a compelling image. But it is not the flat reflecting surface that interests her, but the concave surface of the speculum: "...a concave mirror concentrates the light and,

specifically, [this is] not wholly irrelevant to woman's sexuality" (Irigaray 1985:144). Modernists such as Brecht and Artaud developed methodologies for theatre practice that sought to break the 'mirror' of the realist theatre. However, given an 'Irigarayan' feminist uptake of this notion of shattering the mirror (and, shifting mimesis), it would perhaps be more pertinent to addressing the question of difference to look at the mirror as a curved (rather than a broken) surface. The subject reflected by the curved surface has a certain form of integration (the mimetic surface of the flat mirror is not therefore countered by schizophrenic disorganisation). However, this 'integration' is not the same as a fixed identity: it is not *the same* as anything, for the curved surface is always becoming. As will be seen in the latter half of this thesis, the idea of being and becoming is taken up by feminist performance artists who in a sense institute the use of the curved mimetic surface in their aesthetic in order to cross back to the place of misrecognition (Lacan's mirror) and then represent their flesh beyond the phallogocentric system.

Counter to Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, whose work I turn to in the following section, does not locate repression in the female body exclusively but theorises that language is constructed in terms of masculine and feminine *genres* and that the repression of the feminine serves to maintain gendered power structures that are reproduced in language.

### 1.3.ii Kristeva: the semiotic chora

Kristeva moves away from Irigaray's sexually specific psychic morphology to theorise the processes whereby the drives operate through a system of symbolic exchange or *signifiance* (Kristeva 1984). The subject in Kristeva is produced in language, thus Kristeva does away with biological determinism altogether and views subjectivity as an effect of historically specific signifying practices (which is not to say that the material body is not affected by discourse). The phallogocentric discourse that pervades the modern western world is, for Kristeva, the discourse of modern capitalist patriarchy and as such represses the *genre feminin* (Kristeva 1984) rather than women specifically. In Kristeva (1984) 'masculine' and 'feminine' are genres or modes of signification that are necessary in the generation of language. These genres are not gender specific, but are based on masculine and feminine libidinal energy that men and women possess. However, the feminine is heavily repressed by the masculine genre, the feminine being other than the modes of signification of the dominant symbolic and being termed the *semiotic*. For Kristeva, the

critical moment in the establishment of dominant discourse, the ubiquitous 'scientific imperative' (Kristeva 1984:13) of the symbolic, is the generation of signifiante whereby the subject is ordered by the rules of the symbolic but remains unstable and in process. In order to look at how Kristeva conceives of an intervention in the dominant symbolic, and hence how she imagines an end to oppression, it is necessary to understand further her thinking on subject formation and the subject in process.

For Kristeva, the pre-linguistic body is suffused by doubled and undifferentiated drives or energy, the undivided energies of *jouissance*. As in Freud's bisexual psyche, feminine and masculine energy are aspects of both sexes (although, as we shall see, 'sex' is an effect of discourse or the ordering of the drives). The semiotic has its origins in the pre-linguistic phase that precedes subjectivity and is imbued with *jouissance*, or multiple, undifferentiated pleasure. The rhythms and sensations of the semiotic are continuous with the pre-linguistic, infant body: the infant has not yet differentiated itself from the maternal body. The infant acquires language as it learns to recognise the abject materials dejected from its body as objects separate from itself (the subject) who experiences pleasure in the process of differentiation. The maternal body is also rejected as an object and according to Kristeva (1984:26-27), "[t]he mother's body is ...what mediates the symbolic law organising social relations and becomes the ordering principle of the semiotic chora...". Rejection, or expenditure, "...constitutes the key moment shattering unity" (Kristeva 1984:147), unity referring here to *the jouissance* of the undifferentiated, pre-linguistic body. Entry into the phallogocentric symbolic and its Oedipal structures prohibits identification with that far-off unity with the object, in turn the object is repressed under the sign.

Given Kristeva's view of 'the mother's body', is 'the mother' not entrenched in a negative relationship with the symbolic, her body antagonistic to language and hence necessarily abjected? The maternal body is, in Kristeva, the condition of the *semiotic*. The semiotic is the psychosomatic aspect of the signifying process; the semiotic provides a continuum between the oral and anal sphincters and the rhythm of speech. The *thetic* subject, on the other hand, is the full and proper speaking subject in the symbolic order. The undifferentiated *jouissance* of pre-linguistic life is ordered in the break with the rhythmic bodily-verbal play of the mother's body-voice so that words and the material condition of their production (the body) are separated. The abject-maternal body is

repressed by thethetic. Every enunciation of an / is an enunciation of thethetic because this act of enunciation necessarily excludes the other upon which the / or the one depends for communication; the primary other in this structure is the mother. 'The mother' to which Kristeva refers is an operation in the symbolic, although of course the symbolic is connected to the material. I will look at Kristeva's notion of the *semiotic chora* in order to interrogate the operation of the mother/the semiotic in the symbolic.

The semiotic chora is generated "...in order to attain [the] signifying position" (Kristeva 1984:26). The semiotic chora (1984:26) is defined as: "a non-expressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated". Kristeva (*ibid*) goes on to say that

...the chora, as rupture and articulations (rhythm) precedes evidence, versimilitude, spatiality and temporality. Our discourse- all discourse- moves with and against the chora in the sense that it simultaneously depends upon and refuses it. [The chora] is not a sign nor signifier; it is generated in order to attain this signifying position...Neither model nor copy, the chora precedes and is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm.

The chora, then, is the site of negativity upon which signification depends and refuses; the semiotic chora pushes against the boundaries of the subject and his speech. Signification and the subject are thus radically unstable and in process precisely because the semantic organisation of the subject/his speech depends upon this negated third or in-between. I would view the semiotic chora as a productive alternative to the Lacanian phallus, for the chora, like the mediating surface of skin, is not marked with the gender specificity of the genitalia and is envisioned as a motile and unfixed entity. Kristeva (1984:26) states that:

"We must restore this [the chora's] motility's gestural and vocal play (to mention only the aspect relevant to language) in the level of the socialised body in order to remove motility from ontology and amorphousness". The semiotic chora can be seen to express ambiguity and can be used to explain the contradictions and ambiguities of subjectivity wherein many different subject positions can be taken up by the individual ('individual' here being a contradiction in terms). For Kristeva, the semiotic is already in operation in certain esoteric arts, non-sensical poetry, the carnivalesque and some *avant garde* modernist literature and

dance: in these forms or semiotic practices, she argues (1984), the subject in process is shown, hence restoring the motility of the chora that is repressed under paternal law.

Allowing the semiotic to operate in signifying practices also entails repositioning boundaries between subject and object that guarantee thethetic subject. In canonical psychoanalysis, the boundary between the subject and object is imbued with the perverse structure of fear and fascination. This depends upon a reading of rejection as a private pleasure that is felt simultaneously as an attack against the expelled objects. Kristeva (1984:153) posits that there are two signifying modalities that seem to allow the survival of rejection, that is, a process that would harmonise the shattering brought about by rejection without suppressing it "under paranoid paternal unity". These modalities she names as *oralisation* and *homosexual phratry*. In the former, Kristeva (*ibid*) imagines a reunion with the mother's body, a body that is:

... no longer viewed as an engendering, hollow and vaginated, expelling and rejecting body, but rather as a vocalic one- throat, voices and breasts: music, rhythm and prosody, paragrams, and the matrix of the prophetic parabola; the Oedipus complex of a far-off incest, "signifying" the real if not reality.

Homosexual phratry, on the other hand: appears in the reunion with brother's bodies that will ever pursue...the murder of the One, the Father, in order to impose one logic, one ethics, one but other, critical, combatant, revolutionary (*ibid*). Kristeva's arguments are puzzling, for she seems to relegate the maternal to an idealised pre-linguistic vocal realm (musical) whereas homosexual phratry seems relegated to a singular pathological model [perhaps the distinction of 'homosexual' and 'homosexual' is intended to be considered in translation?]. A comparable 'lesbian sorority' is amiss, entirely unintelligible so it would seem.<sup>6</sup> Granted, Kristeva (1984) is dealing specifically with literature, and looking at language and subjectivity as co-dependent systems that are structured in the constitutive differences between masculine and feminine genres. But what of the application of her theory to interventions in the body politic, particularly in terms of body-centred performance art? Specifically in relation to feminist performance art, I think that Kristeva's

<sup>6</sup> Kristeva states about oralisation and homosexual phratry that: "these two modalities...point to the two sides- poetic and mastering [respectively]- of texts, situated on the path of rejection, which carry out the signifying process by making it a production for community use" (Kristeva 1984: 153)

theory is most interesting and useful when the bodily boundaries between subject, object and abject are literally disrupted. That is, by using the body as the explicit premise of performance, feminist performance artists attempt to pre-empt the symbolic and its paternal laws and treat performance itself as a kind of semiotic *chora*. That is, performance is used to carve out a cultural space wherein ambiguity and contradiction (that Kristeva argues are inherent in the signifying process) can operate. Also, Kristeva's 'subject in process' can be seen to challenge radically the doctrine of identity and thus renders the privilege of the phallic symbolic unstable. The sovereign individual is thus rendered a product of the movements and relations between terms (inside/outside, object/abject) and not the result of an essential internal self. In Kristeva, feminine and masculine are *genres* or types of language use and not irrevocably linked to genital sex. This indicates, ultimately, that the basis for the supremacy of a masculine genre (the phallus) is unstable and that the journey or movement beyond the borderlines of the body and the subject, a journey that is articulated in the abject aesthetic of performance art, envisions the subject re-made and shows up the traces of that re-making.

I will apply Kristeva's thinking on the subject, object and the abject with reference to the performance artists to be discussed, but at this point I shift focus on to the American queer theorist, Judith Butler. Judith Butler's discursive analyses of gender construction, varies from the work of Irigaray and Kristeva. However, these differences produce a productive tension and the kind of intellectual friction that I think is vital to non-dogmatic feminism.

### 1.3 iii Judith Butler: queering the phallus

Both Irigaray and Kristeva theorise systems of signification as an organisation of drives in the body. Judith Butler derives theory on subject formation from psychoanalysis but, as a poststructuralist thinker, focuses on how language *produces* the identities that it names, that is, language is viewed as *performative* and therefore constitutive of the imaginary and symbolic. Whilst Irigaray and Kristeva deconstruct the unconscious acquisition of language and subjectivity, that is, the function of the symbolic, Butler contends that psychic organisation is not internally determined so much as it is produced by an external performative linguistic system that is thoroughly discursive, that is, historically and socially contingent. Thus, for Butler, resistance to repressive gender norms is immanent in

the subject and his or her language. That is, hegemony can be disrupted by the strategic manipulation of signifiers, including linguistic and bodily styles.

Butler's interest lies not so much in thinking gender through a psychoanalytic model of subjectivity, but in questioning the psychically invested constitution of identity as a set of repetitive, constitutive acts; that is, sex-gender-identity is positioned by Butler as discursively produced. Butler's project is to deconstruct the discourse/s that constitute sex, gender and identity, particularly psychoanalytic texts that privilege the heterosexual imperative. Butler (1990b:270) states that: "gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed, rather; it is an identity tenuously constituted in time— an identity instituted through a stylised repetition of acts' (emphasis in original). Butler terms this 'repetition of acts' as 'performativity'. Performativity in this sense is a reformulation of Erving Goffman's speech act theory (Fortier 1997). Within speech act theory, "[a] performative is that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names...it appears that it is by the power or virtue of the power of the subject or its will that a phenomenon is named into being" (Butler 1993:13). For example, the enunciative 'I hereby pronounce you husband and wife' produces that relation. However, Butler, after Derrida, argues that the formulation of the power of the subject to produce speech as an act of an originating will masks the fact that speech acts are always derivative. That is, performative utterances can only function within an already-existing code or iterable model. Butler's succinct question is: "To what extent does discourse gain the authority to bring what it names through citing the conventions of authority?" (*ibid*). Thus, we can consider the materialisation of the (sexed and gendered) body as a kind of sedimentation of discursive norms that are then reproduced through the citation of the *logos* of power. The formation of the / is thus complicit with power.

The problem for resistance is that the subject who would resist norms is "...itself enabled, if not produced by such norms" (Butler 1993:15). So, any resistance to the normalised category "woman" is problematic, for it necessarily re-cites the power structures that have produced that category. Agency, according to Butler, is located as a reiterative practice that is immanent to power and not external to it. This has reference to Irigaray's notion of critical mimesis (that is, returning to the mirror that subtends all speculation) although Butler does not locate resistance in the particular body. Following Butler's arguments around agency and performativity, then, the *political* position of

"woman" may be taken up temporarily in the production of alternative discourses, but we need not be constrained by that identification (although, I would add, that position is contested and the terms of 'constraint' are not always open to negotiation). In terms of performativity and performance, it is understood that performativity, as a reiterative practice, *enables* the subject by constituting the subject as a series of repetitive acts in a temporal framework. Performance, as a cultural form, can draw attention to the constituted nature of subjectivity by staging critical interventions that dismantle the conditions of constraint that "[impel] and sustain performativity" (Butler 1993:95).<sup>7</sup> That is, in performance, the conditions that enable the subject can be reiterated (in order to historicise), camped up, or parodied to the extent that the alignment of the subject under the mastering division between male and female is rendered arbitrary and elastic.

Let us consider further Butler's view on gender performativity. According to Butler, gender is accomplished via the successful repetition of acts which are naturalised through being constructed as an inner or psychic *need*, whilst failure to "do" one's gender (or for that matter, race and class) appropriately results in discrimination and punishment. Gender is thus understood to be "a contemporary way of organising past and future cultural norms, a way of situating oneself in and through those norms, an active style of living one's body in the world" (Butler 1993:95). Gender, and the imaginary for that matter, are the effects of discourse whereby the theatrical acts of imitating identity circle back to the heterosexual imperative that is lodged in the Oedipal schema (to be discussed further in terms of Butler's thinking on loss and melancholia). For Butler, gender functions within the *logic* of the drag act (which is not to say that gender *is* a drag act of self-conscious and even humorous imitation). In Butler's reading of gender identity, the appearance of an internal substance or essence is fabricated upon the surface of the body:

If gender is [seen as] drag, and if it is an imitation that regularly produces the ideal it attempts to approximate, then gender is a performance that produces the illusion of an inner sex or essence or psychic gender core; it produces on the skin, through the gesture, the move, the gait (that array of corporeal theatrics understood as gender presentation) the illusion of inner depth (Butler 2004:134).

<sup>7</sup> Consider, for instance, the effect of sustained repetition in the choreographies of German dance practitioner Pina Bausch (in Broadhurst 1999). Performers in her *Tanztheater* repeat gestural movements *ad nauseum* which draws attention implicitly to the repetitious, performative constitution of social behaviours and institutions that condition the structure that is termed 'identity'.

Nowhere can it be assumed that we can speak outside of a gendered framework. Thus, 'woman' is no more than a copy of a copy, so to speak.

For Irigaray and Kristeva, femininity is an affect of the symbolic. Both theorists work with the notion that there is a dominant patriarchal and phallographic code that overwrites other modes of signification, or difference/the semiotic respectively. Full and proper subjectivity that is constructed at the price of sexual difference or the semiotic respectively (and thus *jouissance*) in Irigaray and Kristeva is reformulated by Butler as a loss of alterity, specifically same-sex identification and desire. The recuperation of the repressed other that is immanent in the subject's formation is envisioned by Irigaray as repressed in the female body and by Kristeva as repressed in the feminine genre. For Butler, it is the modulation of desire within heterocentric structures that prohibits alterity. Butler argues that it is not the loss of the primary maternal object that structures circuits of desire. Thus, gendered identity is premised upon the loss of same-sex attachments that are foreclosed by social rules and specifically the law of the one or the father instituted in the (heterocentric) phallus. This loss is incorporated by the subject (Butler 2004) and thus, Butler argues, normative heterosexual pleasure is premised upon the renunciation and repudiation of homosexual desire. This renunciation takes on aggressive and violent forms in homophobic discourse: Butler encounters the exceedingly straight man or woman as the quintessential gay or lesbian melancholic for according to her thinking, such individuals unwittingly mourn the loss of potential other/non heterosexual attachments and thus incorporate the lost object into the psyche. Butler regards melancholia as a means of potential revolt rather than stasis for, as she states: "the melancholic acceptance and embracing of one's own incoherence and alterity facilitates an epistemological encounter with the other, while psychic survival involves acknowledging that one's emergence as a subject is inaugurated through loss" (Butler 2004:245). So, like Kristeva's (1984) subject in process, the subject in Butler is constantly emerging; subjectivity entails both being and becoming so that the body's boundary is constantly ghosted by that which is pushed aside in order to sustain that boundary. What is implicit in Butler's notion of "[a] melancholic acceptance and embracing of one's alterity..." is a call for rethinking homogenous pathways of desire and circuits of material and linguistic exchange, which is comparable to French feminism's emphasis on revolutionising the phallic or singular symbolic.

Butler (1993:88) challenges the Lacanian phallus by removing it from its referent, the penis, and arguing, in her account of 'the lesbian phallus' that:

If the phallus is an imaginary effect (which is reified as the privileged signifier of the symbolic order), then its structural place is no longer determined by the logical relation of mutual exclusion entailed by a heterosexist version of sexual difference in which men are said to 'have' and women to 'be' the phallus.

Butler goes on to say that, when the phallus is lesbian, then it both is and is not a masculinist figure of power, that is, the signifier is split "...for it both recalls and displaces the masculinism by which it is impelled" (*ibid*). This in effect means that the phallus is a mobile signifier that "...crosses over between having and being the phallus, castration anxiety and penis envy" (Campbell 2000:150) and can thus signify both the masculine and feminine sex. Thus, according to Butler, what is needed is not a new bodily part to replace the symbolic phallus but different imaginary schemas. Essentially, Butler claims that the phallus and its heterocentric orientation in the material body can be disrupted by the lesbian phallus that is immanent in the dominant morphological imaginary. The phallus can thus be used against itself, as it were, in the discourse of critical, queer sexuality. Female subjectivity, then need not be premised upon lack nor silence but can be viewed as a shifting position within a field of many possibilities and identifications. Butler thus views psychoanalysis as a discourse that describes the inculcation of the heterosexual imperative in the subject:

If the formulation of a bodily ego, a sense of stable contour, and the fixing of spatial boundary is achieved through identificatory practices, and if psychoanalysis documents the hegemonic workings of these identifications, can we then read psychoanalysis for the inculcation of the heterosexual matrix at the level of bodily morphogenesis?(/7?/J)

Thus, compulsory heterosexuality is ubiquitous with the formation of a stable and intelligible bodily ego. By showing *vis a vis* Freud and Lacan that same-sex identification and desire are immanent in the formation of the subject, Butler rescues same-sex desire from abject ontological margins. However, female subjectivity in Butler's account is nevertheless circumscribed by the imaginary structures of Freudian and Lacanian

psychoanalysis that are "predicated...on a male body" (Campbell 2000:151), thus Butler's notion of performativity reiterates the content of the imaginary that is established in the work of Freud and Lacan. Butler does not attempt to change language, as Irigaray urges us to do, rather she changes its referent by identifying the lesbian phallus that is immanent in the symbolic. Here I rejoin the discussion of performance and feminist performance art.

The way in which I see Butler's theory as being useful to deconstructions of feminist performance art is through the application of her view of gender as a constitutive norm whereby the body is always ghosted by what is withheld in the production of an apparently unified surface. Thus, the stable, unitary body/image is always ghosted by marginalized and abject bodies and desires that the full and proper subject withholds. Using Butler's theory, we can deconstruct the ways in which gender is historicized and positioned reflexively in feminist performance art. Secondly, I think that Butler's theory points to the pitfalls in claiming, after liberal humanism, that there is an essential or repressed womanhood that will be discovered in pre-linguistic or post-patriarchal praxis, as this view assumes that gender is a natural or necessary category that pre-exists its discursive formation whereas "there is no performer prior to the performed" (Butler 2004:130). As she states, "...in the most intimate encounters with ourselves, the most intimate moments of disclosure, we call upon language that we never made to say who we are" (Reddy and Butler 2004:117). Feminist performance artists have to work with the body as a site of contradiction in this manner calling upon a body that is specularised in the dominant symbolic in order to reimagine and rework the spectacle of flesh and the language that inscribes it. The complex contradictions of 'being' and 'not-being' (a woman) are, however, areas of possibility in whose working it may be envisioned that alternative imaginary schemas can be produced so that alterity does not threaten disorder and pathology so much as the realisation of more fluid desires and identities.

#### **1.4 Reading flesh art against the phallus**

In conclusion to Chapter One, I want to link back with feminist performance art and the ways in which psychoanalytic theory can be applied to the act of transgressing and shifting bodily boundaries that can be seen to be performed in much feminist performance art. Skin in performance art is repeatedly the site of action: the surface of the body is variously

lacerated, marked, stretched, bled, written upon and painted. This concentration upon the skin can hardly be separated from the issues of language identity that have been seen to run through psychoanalytic discourse and the problematic 'subject'.

Freedman (1990:56) questions succinctly: "Given the longstanding debt of psychoanalysis to Classical drama and the centrality of the Oedipus to both disciplines, is a feminist anoedipal theatre possible, or possibly a contradiction in terms?" I would argue that 'feminist', 'anoedipal' and 'theatre' are irreconcilable terms insofar as the 'Oedipal' theatre is invested in the recapitulation of the masculine subject as the site of originating will and authority. Willis (1990: 86) states that:

Tensions articulated in the mirror stage [in Lacan], where the subject recognises/misrecognises its image, are the initial mappings of the mechanisms of visual pleasure: voyeuristic and narcissistic. The imaginary plenitude of the mirrored image, over against the felt dispersion of the subject who views it, produces a sense of separation and lack, and an identificatory fascination simultaneously.

The word/image, then, are products of the desire for an integrated self (identity). Thus, the privileging of the symbolic (that is, the phallic organisation of language and the drives) in conventional, logocentric theatre reiterates the world-forming, performative power of the word whilst negating the material base of language (that is, the body). The *jouissance* of the undifferentiated body is purged by the recitation of *logos* in the theatre whereby narrative, plot and psychological motivation interpellate the performer and viewer into a misidentification with the harmonies and resolutions supplied by the text. This structure in effect reproduces the doctrine of individualism privileged in the logos of the discrete speaking subject. This individualistic, logocentric form of cultural production is ubiquitous with modern capitalist culture wherein theatre functions to allay fears of ontological disorder and particularly castration anxiety (in the masculine-identified viewer) and promulgates the discourse of scientific rationalism and instrumental reason. In this (Oedipal) theatre, the voyeuristic and narcissistic viewer is able to identify with the object (the actor) and project "...secret images within ourselves" (Auslander 1997:37). The text

<sup>8</sup> See Vergine 2000, Miglietti 2003

of the Oedipal theatre thus reiterates the attempt by the misidentified subject to control meaning (that is, attaining the position of the Other/the phallus) and simultaneously sublimates the impotence of the phallus to fix finally the symbolic.

As Loots (1995:148) claims, whilst much feminist writing has highlighted the theoretical need to reclaim 'the body', minimal attention has been focussed upon the "...material, physically lived-in body as needful of feminist analysis and intervention". This is where I think feminist performance art can intervene in dominant forms of representation: the explicit use of the female body as a performance tool offers up the possibility not so much of recuperating a lost, elsewhere, and recuperable feminine symbolic, but of actively producing alterior modes of signification and in turn facilitating the production of feminist analysis. I see this possibility as inherent in feminist performance artist's use of skin in particular as a tool for reworking symbolic structures. Skin comes to be a signifier of difference or the mobile and interstitial, which is analogous with Irigaray's mucous/double lips, Kristeva's semiotic *chora* and Butler's lesbian phallus. The use of skin as a surface of reinscription is not necessarily bound to the *reversal* of the phallic imperative and the re-fixing of sexual difference in genital markers. Shildrick (2001:161) states: "The skin as the most visible boundary between bodies, is both the limit of the embodied self and the site of potentially transgressive investments". This statement I think holds true in the case of performance art. The theatrical framing of performance exploits the presence of the performer, presence being what Auslander (1997:63) describes as "...the matrix of power" in theatre, whilst simultaneously undermining the authority of that presence to guarantee identity. Thus in feminist performance art, the *spectacle* of skin that is marked as sexually specific is used in order to deconstruct and work against the dominant imaginary and its social and aesthetic limitations of the signifier 'woman'. The deconstruction of 'the body' in performance art can thus be viewed as an incremental undoing of the reiterative or performative practises that enabled the subject in the first place. Thus, in feminist performance art, identificatory categories such as 'woman' and 'the body' are disinvested of esoteric or prediscursive meanings. Rather, these categories are deployed critically as temporary and discursively produced: 'woman' becomes an *exoteric* sign that is marked on the body but is always implied to be in inverted commas, so as to remain a contested and shifting sign.

The performing body, unlike the acting body, is a semiotic body that is open and in process. Thus, the notion of a stable or essential interiority or identity is disrupted. The narcissistic projections of the viewer are also disrupted when the image of the acting body is displaced by the performer's live flesh. As Diamond (1997:85) states: "[t]hrough an art constructed from...human bodies, theatre demands a certain distance in order for its illusions to be believed". Performance attempts to destroy the (aesthetic) distance between actor and audience by disrupting the illusion of identity and presence through the very discourse of identity and presence. For feminist performance artists, re-representing the female body in performance resituates the narcissistically invested viewer: the former spectacle (the ubiquitous female body) invests narcissistic energy in reflecting her self in performance whilst closing the gap between her object status and her position as a self-authoring subject. The viewer, then, can no longer invest in the performer's skin as a surface upon which phallic authority is inscribed because the relationship or differentiation between viewing subject and theatrical object is no longer clear. Thus, the use of the explicit body in performance art transgresses the boundaries of the symbolic by re-marking the body literally and thus undermines the symbolic authority of the logocentric structure.

## **Conclusion**

It has been established in Chapter One that to conceive of an exclusive psychic interior and material exterior (that / am located inside myself and excluded from the body of the other) is an obsolete formation, or is at least descriptive of a metaleptic structure whereby the effect or appearance of identity is taken to be its cause. In the dominant imaginary, the affectations of femininity are given a causal link to the biological body whereas 'femininity' can be viewed as discursively constructed and performative. In this sense, the biological and the cultural body are indiscernible, for culture and physiology are imbricated. The view that identity is not innate or essential does not infer that the body is a blank slate or that we cannot resist the discourse that inscribes the body and schematises the psyche. The relationship between the body's surface, the skin, and imaginary structures is important to feminist discourse if the phallic imaginary is to be decentred for the centrality of the phallic imaginary has linked the masculine with subjectivity, authority and culture and the feminine with base maternity, materiality and nature. This has in effect rendered the female body unrepresentable except in terms of variations of the monstrous maternal or the sexualised spectacle.

In Chapter Two, I build upon the theories around identity and subjectivity that have been analysed and critiqued in Chapter One and look at gendered constructions of time and space. The construction of the gendered subject in terms of his/her orientation in time and space will be seen to reiterate the privilege of the phallographic imaginary.

## Chapter 2

### Mapping Silence: disruptions of time, space and place

#### Introduction

This chapter develops the arguments about subjectivity and subject formation that were covered in Chapter One, as I contend that the subject (/) and symbolic forms are produced within a matrix of gendered time-space relations. I argue that dominant forms of space-time relations have resulted in the privileging of a phallogocentric symbolic and the negation of women-centred knowledge systems and representational economies. This I unpack in sections one to four of Chapter Two, with specific reference to the discursive mapping of the female body *as* space in classical, Judeo-Christian, psychoanalytic and biomedical discourses. I will also consider how the gendered division of space, coupled with the spatialisation of the female body has been sedimented in terms of domesticity and phenomenological experience. I argue that the gendered division of social spaces and the patterns and pathways that women articulate with their bodies in space are heavily regulated by the discursive construction of dominant time-space relations.

In section five of Chapter Two, I argue that theatrical space since its foremost inception in classical cultures has been invested in representations of gendered space. As the social position of 'woman' has changed, so too has the construction of theatrical space (Scolnicov 1994). I argue that the crisis of reason- a crisis of the logocentric subject- that characterises postmodernity is contingent with the dissolution of theatre into performance, which attempts to transgress the limits of theatrical time-space matrices and hence representation. Performance art specifically ruptures or problematises the constitutive borderlines between time and space by dissolving or rupturing that borderline quite literally upon the body. I contend that feminist performance artists subvert dominant modes of representing the relationship between time and space by disrupting the *telos* of a fixed identity.

## 2.1 The female body as space: a (concise) genealogy

This section deals broadly with examples of the historical, ontological assumptions that underpin the elision of 'woman' with 'space' and the construction of subjectivity in terms of divisions between concepts of time and space.

Scolnicov (1994:147) states that: "...man relates to space through building himself dwellings, through clearing for himself enclosed spaces. Man's building activity creates locations that man relates to space". In Scolnicov's view, the unqualified 'man' locates himself subjectively through the act of ordering space. Space is constituted, that is, constructed, formed and remade, but is not granted constitutive properties. I contend that the relation of "man" to space is not merely wrought through the construction of the literal dwelling, but through the structuring of time-space relations or *matrices* that in effect order the relations of gendered bodies. That is, the organisation of language and knowledge, which are representational systems, is formed in relation to space via the negation of the abject potential of spatial motility (a link between Kristeva's concept of the semiotic chora in Chapter 1 can be made here). Indeed, Curtis (2000:155-56) states that: "The sensible intuitions of space and time are intrinsic to the faculty of representation and pertain, therefore, to an interiority called the T think". It has been established in Chapter One that the enunciative / is precluded for women by the symbolic contract. Thus, the feminine subject lacks the interiority necessary to the 'I think', an interiority that I stress is constructed and supported by the historical association of the female body with matter (*mater*) as opposed to the transcendental rationality and logical thought processes attributed to the masculine subject. Grosz (1995) claims that representations of space have had, and continue to have, a priority over representations of time- although 'space' is no more concrete a concept than 'time' and the subject is not represented any more clearly in space than in time. This bias has foundations in the elision of the female body with space and associations of both nurturance and destruction attached to this generic female body. The containment and castration of this containing and chaotic body enables the masculine subject as such and necessitates the favoured representation of space as a mechanism of domination.

### 2.1.i Plato's *chora*

The collapsing of the female body and a 'natural' or biologically predisposed subjectivity, in terms of the historical association between woman and matter, or formless space, can be seen to have a pervasive precedent in masculinist classical thinking. Indeed, the universal of woman as formless space or volume and man as the time of generation can be traced back explicitly to Plato's theory of the *chora* (Grosz 1995). In *Timaeus*, Plato posited that there is an invisible and unchanging world of perfect forms that pre-exist the sensible. The realm of the sensible is the visible realm of sensory perception. In order for the intelligible to be comported into the realm of the sensible, there must be a third term or bridge. Plato refers to this bridge as the *chora*. The *chora* acts as "...a receptacle, intermediary, [a] kind of womb of material existence" (Grosz 1995:115). The function of the *chora* in the production of forms is non-contributive, indeed the *chora* must be a neutral (non)entity in order to ensure that the reproduction of forms remain traceless to its incubator.

The *chora* is not *sexed per se* but is feminine gendered (in Greek). Plato compared explicitly the role of the Forms to the role of the male and the *chora* to the role of the female, that is, the biological male is assumed to possess a generative function whilst the female is the carrier of the masculine imprint. It is noted that Plato's philosophy was in a sense limited to the socio-historical context of classical Greece in which the prevailing reproductive myth was that a male/father contributed all specific characteristics to the nameless and formless incubation provided by the female/mother. However, as will be seen in the discussion of modern biomedicine, the ontology that underpins this discourse is not entirely innovative in its perceptions of sexual difference. Plato's logic is also supported by the classical Hippocratic and Aristotlean texts<sup>9</sup> in which it is assumed that the female of the (human) species is by nature lacking the fundamental characteristic-/ogus- of the masculine (that is, a full and proper) subject and hence access to the world-forming temporal powers attributed to the rational individual. That is, women, like unformed space, were assumed to be without logic (*alogos*) and irrational.

<sup>9</sup> The specific texts referred to here are the *Hippocratic Corpus* (medical texts) and Aristotle's *Generation of Animals*.

The function of the *chora* is to "nurse, support, surround, protect, incubate, to sort or engender the worldly offspring of the Forms" (Grosz 1995:115). The function of women elided thus with the *chora*, is to reproduce without mark or intervention offspring that have a paternal origin. In Plato's logic, the 'time', or instrumentality, of female bodies is negligible in comparison to the crucial instance of man's time, as Grosz (1995:116) reiterates when she states that:

This peculiar receptacle that is chora functions to receive, to take in, to possess without in turn leaving any correlative impression. She takes in without holding onto: she is unable to possess for she has no self-possession, no self-identity. She supports all material existence with nothing to support her own. Though she brings being into becoming, she has neither being nor the possibilities of becoming; both the mother of all things and yet without ontological status, she designates less a positivity than an abyss.

Thus, the ontological reduction of the female body to an envelope of space forecloses the possibility of taking up a position of generative contribution. The maternal body, conceived of as a space or *chora* is thus the quintessentially silent body. This silent, spatialised body can be seen to re-emerge in Judaeo-Christian and modern secular forms, most notably in the form of the Madonna in the former and the castrated female of psychoanalytic tradition in the latter, which I will discuss.

### 2.1 .ii Madonna/Whore

One of the foundational fantasies of pre-modern western theology that relies upon the ontology of 'woman as space' is the Madonna/whore dichotomy. The virgin mother has been reified in Christian doctrine and popular iconography as the apotheosis of feminine virtue joined, I might add, with generative function. The production of the Madonna will be seen to be little more than a rehearsal of Plato's thinking on the *chora*, although Christian monotheism displaces the realm of Plato's Forms with one, originating God.

The Madonna springs from the Biblical tale of the immaculate conception, in which God's representative, the angel Gabriel, descends from an invisible, heavenly realm to visit

the Virgin Mary and inform her that she has been chosen to carry the Son of God. The seed (Word) of God is thus despatched into Mary's *ear*, an act that displaces performatively the womb to the ear (see Phelan 1993). The phallic Word thus enters the ear/womb and the law of the father is in effect reproduced via the body of a woman who has no contribution to the generation of the Son of God except the *carte blanche* space of her body. The Madonna is a universalised maternal bodily container that comports the performative Word of God into the material world in the form of a male child. The virgin female becomes a body-as-blank-page, so to speak, which is paramount to the production of a being with a singular, immaculate, paternal origin. The immaculate conception supports the belief that the genesis of bodies, meaning and worlds is guaranteed by masculine time that has authority in and over space.

The construction of a reified, impossible mother (a virgin mother is a contradiction in terms) in the form of the Madonna has established a representational regime whereby women are caught between identifications with the 'good' virgin and the 'bad', abject counterpart, the whore. The whore-body is conceived of as polluted and polluting, she is 'damaged goods' in the sense that she has been stained and is no longer fit for the role of reproduction. Like the unmarking, clean space of the Platonic *chora*, the virgin and the Madonna remain under the paternal name or mark. The virgin/whore dichotomy binds the female body to an interpretation of that body either as a cultural *cloaca* in the case of the whore, or a potential reproductive function, in the case of the virgin. It is not negative *per se* that the Madonna is a mother but that theological iconography binds the female body, mothers and motherhood to a limited maternal role—one of preservation of the Word, family and nation. Kristeva (in Ruben-Suleiman ed. 1993:34) states: "The biological fate that causes us [women] to be the site of the species chains us to space: home, native soil, motherland (*matrie*) (as I wish to say, instead of fatherland [*patrie*])" (emphasis in original). I would argue that it is more a matter of dominant interpretations of female biology that 'chains' women to space rather than 'biological fate': an interpretation that is borne out by the theological construction of the dichotomy between the good-maternal Madonna and the bad-maternal whore. Even in contemporary Afrocentric discourses that attempt to reverse imperialist discourse (in terms of the reification of 'mother Africa'), the maternal-as-carrier returns and results in the perpetuation of 'woman' as a symbolic repository for authentic or unmarked culture. This in effect negates the dissonant voices from actual women who have been excluded from the symbolic of dominant patriarchies.

The Madonna icon is, of course, far more complex in terms of her appropriation in theological and popular forms and knowledges. However, the history of the Madonna is not my focus here, but rather the way in which the good/bad, virgin/whore dichotomy has been built around the instance of motherhood and its social construction as a "biological fate that...chains us [women] to space" (*ibid*). In terms of this negative, fatalistic inscription of female biology, I think that psychoanalysis, as I discuss in section 2.1.ii, inherits from Christian doctrine an assumption that woman and space are analogous terms and these function only *in relation* to The Word or, in psychoanalysis, the crucial instance of the phallus.

### 2.1.iii The spatial modalities of psychoanalysis

It can be seen that, in canonical psychoanalysis, the religious community established in the European Christian church is pared down to the relationship between analyst and patient, a relationship that is established, simplistically, between a subject and object of *inquiry*. What this means for the interpretation of bodies, and the female body specifically, is that the discourse about the female body shifted from a general idea of that body as a containing space to the spatialisation of the female genitalia in the phallogocentric symbolic system. In psychoanalysis, the preceding classical time-space matrices conceived in Plato's imagistic forms and the spatial entity of the *chora* and the theological concept of God's phallic Word and the corresponding virgin ear/womb are displaced by the imagistic phallus. There is no counterpart to the singular, symbolic phallus other than the zeroed space of castration.

In the Oedipal scenario, the instance of castration is central to the narrative development of the subject's ego. This scenario is hinged upon the outwardly visible *evidence* of sexual difference, the genitalia. The symbolic phallus is the transcendental signifier or form. Thus, the visibility of the penis holds the promise (always deferred) that he-who-possesses-penis has the authority to satisfy desire/guarantee meaning, which in turn ensures his ontological authority. In canonical psychoanalytic theory it is the visibility and exteriority of the penis (in Freud) and the fixed signifier of the phallus (in Lacan) that privileges the presence of the organ/signifier as the site for the generation of sexuality, subjectivity and language and the satisfaction of desire. As has been established in Chapter

One, the maternal genitalia are negated by the phallic imaginary as a cultural *cloaca*, site of both fear and infantile desires (Gallop 1988). The internalised structure of the maternal genitalia results, for Freud and Lacan, in a crisis over a lack of *visual* specificity and so 'her' lips come to represent a spatialised abyss of cultural abjection where language does not hold. The canonical psychoanalytic view, then, clearly inherits from a gender-biased classicism a view that the female body is by nature lacking in the *logos* that characterises the male subject. Psychoanalysis, however, pins psychic and symbolic lack explicitly to the genitalia.

In psychoanalytic discourse, the trope of the maternal can be seen to displace the iconographic Madonna. However, the maternal body, unlike the Madonna icon, is subject to pervasive new technologies that developed particularly in the discourses of psychiatry and biomedicine (in which psychoanalysis has its grounding). I now turn to consider the idea of the female body as a biomedical space. I give this topic attention because, for one, the discourse of biomedicine is peculiar to the modern context and secondly, it is a pervasive and highly esteemed discourse that establishes and sediments gendered power structures and representations of the body. Moreover, biomedicine deals directly with the body and has established a theatrics that is not unrelated to 'theatre' in the traditional sense.

## **2.2 Women as biomedical space**

The female body as a biomedical space was established within the framework of scientific rationalism, a discourse that developed from enlightenment epistemology. The discourse of scientific rationalism positioned a monolithic version of masculinity (and the correlative "man") as the neutral, universal intellectual observer. Whilst the privileged masculine term was endowed with a naturalised authority, the sets of inferior terms in the taxonomy of being (a taxonomy that positioned women, 'savages', or non-Europeans, and the insane in similar atavistic categories) were fundamentally subjugated.

Boys (1999:187) states that the version of masculinity that lumps a set of inferior terms or abject identities in opposition, or inferior to, the masculinity of rational observation "has framed the shaping of spaces and technologies in particular ways", ways that I would include are peculiar to the development of modern patriarchies. In the modern

patriarchal state, the biomedical practices that developed within its frameworks no longer limited the gaze to the surface of the body. In modern biomedicine, the human corpus began to be treated as a spatialised arrangement between exterior surface and the private, fleshy interiors of the body. Notably, the perceived interiority of the psyche is conceptualised in a similar manner in the discourse of psychoanalysis. These practices, biomedicine and psychoanalysis, are validated by the perverse implantation of the all-knowing intellectual observer, a figure that emerged during the Enlightenment. This decidedly masculine figure was contingent with the production of a discourse of scientific expertise, expertise that relied upon the ability to "...isolate objects or events from their contexts in time and space in order to concentrate on a specific activity or quantified functions" (Kauffman 1998:73).

In material space, those confident of the authority and the normality of their gaze and their actions (those who are 'experts') might fail to consider the partiality of looking and doing because they can, according to Boys (1999: 187) "take for granted their freedom to perform their own identities [whilst those of us located in the zone of the other] are constantly aware of the performative nature of identities and spaces". Those who are othered cannot take up the transcendental, morally superior position of the neutral observer because the other is already figured as immanent and embodied, hence morally questionable *by nature*. In post-feudal European societies, enlightenment discourse seized upon the female body as a natural (as opposed to cultural) phenomenon. Notably, the bodies of non-Europeans were also considered closer to 'nature' and were consequently feminised, that is, spatialised, in colonial discourses. Of course, with the development of technology, modern societies could exploit natural resources as never before, colonising and delineating property in a flurry of conquest and war. Women, like 'savages' and animals, were considered unpredictable, irrational, amoral and sexualised.

Early modern European thought held that the female sex was: "the disorderly one par excellence...where her genius for social disorder was associated with a propensity for sexual instability" (Zeglin Brand 1995:39). So, early modern European thought reproduced a discourse of nature-including women in this category, as unmediated, threatening and abounding in resources. Space was available to the mechanisms of scopic intelligence to be uncovered, demarcated and colonised, and this is where penetrative technologies emerged as the discursive norm for defining and representing the biomedical subject.

### 2.2.i Mapping the biomedical body

The condition of becoming one thing or another is dependent upon a transitory phase, the in-between if you will. Space, without the mark of time, is always becoming. In terms of biomedical technology, the scientific data wielded from the body-becoming, and particularly the maternal body (which is a paradigmatic example of 'bodies-becoming') has been marked by a particularly gender biased stylistics. Anatomical knowledge prior to enlightenment scientific rationalism was based upon a combination of tactile and visual experience. Cartesian dualism epitomises the active transition from pre-Enlightenment preoccupations with death, disease and mortality from the first person perspective to a discourse of the body as an abstract phenomenon. Visibility was privileged as a means to accessing the truth of the body whilst the senses were considered inferior and inaccurate. The body-made-visible, particularly in Enlightenment dissection and medical drawings, was central to the production of scientific discourse about the body. Bleeker (1999:5) draws an analogy between the imperial project and the mapping of bodies:

Like foreign countries and remote areas, the body was explored and charted in what is called an anatomical atlas. In this process of mapping the body, science became more and more preoccupied with dead bodies of others, eventually turning the body itself into an 'other' (Bleeker 1999: 5)

Although both the bodies of men and women were opened up as public spectacle in theatres of dissection, whereby the body was mapped out as Bleeker states above, the cadaver nevertheless signifies in gendered ways: "[t]he imagery of Nature unveiled before

Science, of the body stripped of its fleshy protection and penetrated by the empirical gaze is strongly gender linked" (Shildrick 1997:31).

It was also assumed, through the Renaissance and to some extent into the era of modern science, that the female body was homologous with the male body. This 'one sex' model, inherited from Aristotle, reiterated that the female body and genitalia were an inferior version of the male. Modern science developed the idea of sexual difference, but female difference was nevertheless maintained as a mark of radical lack and inferiority. Thus the opening up of interior spaces of the female body in dissection was represented in images of corporeal discontinuity. The exterior and interior of the female body was shown typically as insubstantial, so that organs, particularly the uterus, seemed to float in unsupported suspension (see Fig. 1). The interior and exterior of the body seemed to have no necessary relation. On the other hand, anatomical illustrations of the male body tended to focus on skeletal and muscular structure, so that the male body is represented as substance that takes up space.

As has been mentioned, women within this context were elided with Nature. However, the difference was that the more positive aspects of nurturance were "...overridden by the rationalist characterisation of nature as wild and chaotic, but nevertheless fundamentally machine-like and potentially controllable" (Shildrick 1997:26). By the mid- nineteenth century, the process of knowing the world "[had become] largely a matter of establishing natural objects as visually accessible" (Spurr 1993:17-18): the object in space had to be assigned a teleological position in order to be known. As in psychoanalysis, there seems to be a desire in biomedical discourse to create transparency in the patient, to be able to access a psychic or physical interiority respectively. Psychoanalysis itself has established roots in biomedicine whereby the cause of mental disease was assumed to be organic, rather than social, in origin. Thus the interior of the body, and particularly the brain and female reproductive organs, were given a clear causal link to mental disease, especially hysteria.

### 2.2.ii Being and becoming

Pregnancy of course presented a mystery of sorts to the early modern biomedical fraternity because, not only did it present the problem of breached boundaries, but it also frustrated the desire to see what was *inside* the body. Modern biomedicine solves this problem by

instituting anatomical dissection as a means to accessing the invisible workings of the body. However, representations of the previously private interior of the womb have tended to be disembodied images of a foetus, floating in a womb-space independent of a maternal body (see Fig. 2). This tendency translates into contemporary biomedical practice in the form of New Reproductive Technology (NRT). Sonograms and video technology now enable the medical expert to produce pictures of the foetus *in utero*. The desire for transparency is realised quite literally in this instance. However, the embodied uterus is not an explicit concern in these representations; the condition of a 'whole' maternal body is negated. At best, she is reduced to an organ (a uterine function) that carries a foetus. Making her body transparent and displaying the developing foetus without reference to the mother's body in effect passivises the pregnant female body and reduces the female body to a maternal-function, not unlike the Platonic *chora*. Shildrick claims that:

There is little sense in current medical literature of the woman as intentional agent, but only of disembodied and discrete reproductive processes. What is represented is not the mother, but at best fragmentary bits of her. Even in the very early stages of pregnancy, the shadowy images of ultrasound serve to construct the foetus as an entity in its own right. The rest is space and silent (Shildrick 1997:41, emphasis mine).

In this biomedical scenario, the body-object is revisited in scientific terms and is again rendered a blank slate, *chora* or reproductive space that does not contribute to its (her) own interpretation. "Time" documents the progress of the pregnant body-space as science dissects the body to "see how it works", that is, the body becomes a mirror for the assumptions and machinations of 'expert' discourse.

Braidotti links the scopophilic drive of modern biomedicine to the question of origins:

The desire to know is, like all desires, related to the problem of representing one's origin, of answering the most childish and consequently fundamental of questions: 'where did I come from?' Scientific knowledge becomes, in this perspective, an extremely perverted version of that original question (Braidotti 1999: 40).

Braidotti indicates that modern scientific discourse rationalises the female body in order to obscure sexual difference and subsume knowledge production under the originating law of the Father/the One/phallus. The desire of science to know the female body in such invasive and technocratic ways is, I argue, a desire to maintain that body as a mute space, to take her apart and understand the machinations of the body in ways that concur with dominant representations of passive female subjectivity.

As has been stated, representations of space are commonplace, whilst representations of time only really occur in relation to space. The tendency towards the disproportionate representation of time and space reflects the scopic interests of scientific rationalism whereby that which is made visible is drawn into the theatre of surveillance and regulatory ideals (Foucault 1977). In the instance of a phallographic, patriarchal society, the ways in which space, nature and women are represented is paramount to the maintenance of their subjugation on the *other* side of binary oppositions. Space and nature are maintained as exterior, and thus inferior, to culture. Space in this formation is something that is just 'there', natural, immanent; it does not signify without the mark of time to form it into an image, utility or tool. The fear and fascination that accompany the penetration of the space of the other in the act of temporalising that space eroticises the body of the other whilst simultaneously repressing the potential desire and agency of that body. So, it can be seen that as biomedical subject, the female body is represented as a mute territory.

Thus far, I have concentrated upon the treatment of the female body *as* space, that is, analogous with space. However, as is apparent from the citations of various biomedical practises above, the dominance of 'time'— perhaps I could say a 'teleological imagination', over the spatial is produced in terms of ontological as well as material relations. Thus, the division of geographical space along gendered lines and the ways in which the subject is then induced to perform gendered identity by virtue of these gendered divisions is important to the interrogation of time-space relations. Hence, I will now pursue the idea that the domestic interior is a primary social site of gendered divisions.

### 2.3 Women's space: home-bodies

The deployment of sexuate discourses of time and space in the construction of gender relations has not only produced a discourse that constructs women as space, but has also sanctioned the role of women within the interior of the home dwelling. Massey (1994:179) states that:

...space and place are important in the construction of gender relations and in struggles to change them. From the symbolic meaning of spaces/places and the clearly gendered messages that they transmit, to the straightforward exclusion by violence, spaces are not only themselves gendered, but, in their being so, they both reflect and affect the ways in which gender is constructed and understood.

Massey's argument has application to the question of the genderisation of the domestic interior, for this social convention has served to normalise feminine roles in the home. The sedimentation of the role of woman as carrier, container and home-body is rooted in classical cosmologies whereby the interior of the home or the space of the *oikos* was designated women's space, whilst men were granted the mobility of travel, commerce, war and public affairs of the *polls*. Time within the limits of the house is repetitive, the patterns of domestic ritual are repeated by the women who produce and nurture generations whilst men in the world outside enact teleology in world-forming actions, supported by the material base of woman and home. 'Woman' is designated the guardian of the hearth and threshold of the home.

Scolnicov (1994:13), with reference to Foucault, states that the home-shelter "gives the family its spatial organisation; by contrast the descendants provide the family with its temporal dimension". Hence, the privileging of a patrilinear genealogy in patriarchal structures recognises masculine generation (a temporal activity) whilst the contribution of women to the established familial structures is practically by default, always in relation to a central masculine figure. Elizabeth Grosz connects the discursive construction of a (normalised) masculine universe, ordered by masculine time, and the contingent subjugation of the bodies of women/space. Grosz states that:

Men [sic] build a universe built upon the erasure of the bodies and contributions of the bodies of women/mothers and the refusal to acknowledge the debt to the maternal body that they owe. They hollow out their interiors and project them outward, and then require women as supports for this hollowed space. Women become the guardians of the private and the interpersonal, while men build conceptual and material universes. This appropriation of the right to place or space correlates with men's seizure of the right to define and utilise spatiality that reflects their own self representation (Grosz in Boys 1999:198).

The space of the "private and the interpersonal" is most regularly the domestic interior that is identified with women. The domestic space is identified with women by virtue of its antagonism with the world of public affairs. Without the necessary faculties of an originating will, moral individualism, or reason that characterise the classical masculine subject, the role of femininity is institutionalised as a prop for the masculine universe. Thus, " 'she' must be no more than the path, the method, the theory, the mirror for the subject that leads back, via a process of repetition, to the recognition of (his) origin" (Irigaray 1991:65, emphasis in original). A mirror is merely a reflective surface. 'Woman' thus stands in as a mute reflection of 'man'; 'space' to his 'time'. By the same token, 'home' becomes a necessary condition for the promulgation of masculine energies in the world at large.

### 2.3.i Doubling up the domestic body

The ubiquity of 'woman' with the private, domestic sphere in classical cultures re-emerged most clearly in the modern city whereby the 'proper', domesticated woman was constructed in opposition to the abject 'public' woman, who was marked as a whore. In the modern city, the flaneur, or disinterested observer who roams the streets at ease, is a decidedly male figure whereas the unaccompanied female is again marked as a 'cheap' and licentious whore. Matters of civic interest were not deemed suitable for the 'proper' woman, who is again instituted as homekeeper and maternal figure. In the context of contemporary urbanisation, the gendered divisions between public and private space are still apparent. It is generally frowned upon for women to move about alone in public, as this is seen as an indication of her sexual availability (reiterated in the 'blaming the victim'

scenario in rape discourse). Thus, the domesticated, maternal woman remains a morally intelligible female figure whilst the 'public woman' is subject to gender-biased scrutiny-

Suffice to say, the domesticated female is not given to public cultural contribution and commentary, which in effect means that 'woman' is represented but not self-representative, she takes up space— she is space, but does not author it. Here again we have the problem of agency and authorship, for the domesticated, spatialised female body is by definition incapable of aesthetic contribution. If women seize upon masculine discourse and reproduce its violent dichotomies by uncritically taking on traditionally masculine roles of conquest and domination (over space), the masculine standard remains entrenched and the constitutive division between private and public space is maintained. The question remains as to how the problematic relationship between time, space and identity can be shifted.

Irigaray (1991:65) suggests that it is only by turning to a consideration of the sexually specific female body that we may begin to reinterpret the female body not as a flat, reflecting surface or space for the masculine standard, as has been seen in the relationship between public-masculine and domestic-feminine spaces, but as upon the curved surface of the speculum. The speculum represents a doubling that is, as Irigaray (1985a) says, not unrelated to the female sex. This concept of 'doubling' challenges the exclusive dichotomies of the mastering divisions between time and space, public and private. Let us look at Irigaray's thinking further in relation to the idea of the domesticated female body.

Irigaray's image of the gynaecological mirror, the speculum, as a trope for reworking the symbolic 'woman' locates difference in the female body, that is, women are seen to be different in and of themselves and not only in comparison to men. This argument could be viewed as operating at the level of feminist ontology, but as I understand it, the doubling of the speculum is infinite in that there is no singular origin, self or woman to be spoken of. So then, Irigaray's theory does not preclude the deconstruction of the discursive structures of domesticity, rather it shows up the fundamental premises (maternal body/blood) that support the transcendent rationality of the generative paternal figure.

As far as Irigaray's concept of 'doubling' or difference is concerned, this is pertinent to broader arguments in this thesis, and of course relates back to the discussion of subjectivity in Chapter One, for I contend repeatedly in that Chapter and beyond it that, in order for the symbolic contract to be transgressed, exclusive dichotomies between masculine/feminine, language/flesh and indeed time/space will need to be thought *through*, that is, the threshold be transgressed. This transgression can be thought of as a kind of fold, or doubling of surfaces/spaces. In this sense, the gendered division between public and private space can be recuperated critically as a point of social and economic intersection: a fold, rather than a division, where gender politics operates in tenuous relation, open to change. Of course this is not a new contention, indeed it harks back to the second-wave feminist mantra of 'the personal is the political', which was rooted in an interrogation of the gendered power relations between the domestic, private sphere and public life.

Clearly, one of the dominant spatial relationships that have defined the female body is the domestication of women in terms of their biological function and their social role in this sphere (as wives, mothers and daughters). It will be seen in the discussion of the selected performance artists that the division between the domestic interior, the private 'self' and public discourse is interrogated and transgressed, for it is a division that maintains strongly the female body as a spatialised object.

## **2.4 Bodies in space**

The genderisation of space involves not only the language that authors space, but also the ways in which discourses "[devolve] back into the embodied subject" (Garner 1994:198). That is, the prescription of gender roles socialises the subject into assuming ways of performing the body in the articulation of spatial pathways. The way that we stand, gesture, walk, sit, our phenomenological inscriptions in space, are imbricated with gendered meanings.

McDowell (1999) uses the term *hexis* to describe the relationship between the social and its inscription upon bodies. The hexis between bodies and the social environment means that subjects will have varied ways of moving, bearing their bodies, presenting their bodies to others and moving in or making space for their bodies. Prohibitions and pleasures are instituted within social spaces and bodies so that bodies are disciplined into gendered behaviours by spaces that are themselves sexuate. Thus,

'woman', as the inferior subject in patriarchal systems, is instated as a visual object in masculine spatial networks.

#### 2.4.i Body-object

As an object, the body takes up space. However, the spatialisation of the feminine body-object, and indeed the spatialisation of the bodily interior as discussed in terms of biomedical discourse, regulates strictly her ability to engage with and author space. Thus, the social standards of gendered movement in space become inculcated in the embodied subject. Young (in Garner 1994:201) argues that girls cannot throw, so to speak, because the standards of feminine body comportment result in women making less ergonomic use of their bodies than men and instead move parts of their bodies in an inhibited and discontinuous fashion, hence "...the phenomenon of 'throwing like a girl'" (*ibid*). Thus, the female body that moves in spatial pathways that are inconsistent with femininity potentially disrupts the mechanics of the social theatre. The image of the female body moving in unbounded pathways. For instance, the Bacchae or the Victorian 'hysteric', is consistently accompanied by fear and fascination. The version of femininity described in terms of softness, vulnerability and weakness (shadowed of course by the image of monstrous excess) is not given to the construction of worlds in the way that masculinity (*logos, telos*) is given to the muscular sculpting and mapping of the unknown. The territorializing of female flesh has led to distinctive mappings of the female body itself that have negated or dumbed down female self-representation, including the ways in which women move their bodies in space.

Garner (1994:201-202) states that: "a woman's modalities of bodily comportment, motility and spatiality...are characterised by tension, ambiguity and duality". These affectations can hardly be separated from their ontological imperatives that dislocate female corporeality from the production of language and culture, that is, the authoring of social spaces, in the first place. Garner (*ibid*) emphasises that these modes of feminine bodily experience are social in origin rather than physiological and that "...such structures of feminine existence derive from the fact that a woman's body is presented to her as an object rather than an instrument of possibility" (emphasis mine). Garner's statements have important links to Chapter One wherein canonical psychoanalytic theory was seen to construct accounts of feminine psychic morphology that typically privileges the phallus

and the tracing of a masculine morphology in the symbolic order. It can be seen that women in the dominant patriarchal order are precluded from symbolic *and* material authorship because they lack the instrument of privilege, that is, the phallus. This issue provokes the question of representation, for the way in which one uses and moves the body in the world, in space, is a way of representing one's self as a subject (and I will pursue the question of representation and aesthetics further in terms of a discussion on the construction of theatre space). The presence of the biological penis and its reification in the psychoanalytic symbolic contract conventionally privileges the instrumentality of the male subject and his body in space. The crush between the psychoanalytic interpretation of feminine lack and the perceived biological inferiority of the female body contributes to the discursive production of the severely limited spatial pathways and patterns that women tend to follow.

#### 2.4.ii Surveillance and control

Drawing upon Foucault's (1977) thinking on the panopticon, feminists such as Bartky (1988) have theorised the multivalent sites of surveillance and control that discipline the female body specifically. The modern state produces what Foucault (1977) refers to as 'docile bodies' that operate under the machinery of power, these bodies being non gender-specific. The production of these so-called 'docile bodies' relies upon the mechanisms of regulating the body's time in space (through devices such as timetables, bells and whistles) and the maintenance of that control via continuous surveillance (for example, guards and video surveillance). This constant surveillance induces in the subject a mode of self-surveillance and a ubiquitous 'docile body'. This self-regulatory discipline, states Foucault (1977:138) "...disassociates power from the body, it turns it into an 'aptitude'". When we turn to consider the means whereby patriarchy has consolidated its functions, it is apparent that the female body has been subjected to gender-specific forms of surveillance and control.

It has been discussed in some detail that the mechanism of dividing public and private spaces between men and women, that has been consolidated in the modern patriarchal state, enables feminine domestication and self regulation in this sphere. Added to the discourse of domesticity, particularly within modernity we see a shift towards targeting the female body as the object of biomedicine's scopophilic tendencies (perhaps

we can view this shift to biomedicine as one that takes up the place of religious regulation and the all-seeing, despotic God). The spatialised female body, then, is rendered visible to the disciplinary gaze and its anthropological investments in hierarchy and taxonomy. This disciplinary gaze is identified by theorists such as Laura Mulvey, a film theorist, as quintessentially masculine and encountered as an internalised phenomenon in the feminine subject. We have already seen how a penetrating gaze has mapped out the female biomedical subject, and this scrutinising gaze is reproduced in anthropological discourse that organises bodies in terms of visible taxonomies. In classical anthropology, the other is pinned under the gaze of the anthropologist (the universal intellectual) whose gaze constitutes cultures "...as if they were theatres of spatialised arrays" (Clifford and Marcus 1986: 12). The connection that I make here to the broad issue of the female body fixed by and fixated upon by scopic, masculine intelligence is that, as the object of an intracultural anthropological gaze, 'woman' becomes something of a curiosity: 'woman' becomes a site of spectacle or, to use Fabian's terms, a 'spatialised array'. This *theatricalisation* of the female subject, I argue, dislocates women from both culture *and* themselves (that is, a subjectivity or self that is not the inferior term of a masculine/feminine binary). In other words, the condition of the feminine subject is to be a perpetually embodied foreigner. Indeed, Kristeva (1993:17) contends that it is hardly coincidental that the first foreigners mentioned in Greek mythology are women, the Danaides, who spoke a different language and were unavailable for marriage. As a perpetual 'foreigner', then, 'woman', if she is to be intelligible as such, is dogged by self-conscious attempts to perform a feminine physicality appropriately.

#### 2.4.iii Towards a critical mimesis

It has been established that simply reversing the instrumentalism of phallogocentric discourse will merely reiterate the privilege of the phallus to signify and dominate space representationally. In phenomenological terms, the uncritical reproduction of typically masculine modes of embodiment, and masculine spatial pathways, will not serve to destabilise masculine privilege (I specify *uncritical* as the critical mimicking of modes of masculine embodiment in cross-gender play can be considered as transgressive). Irigaray (1991) suggests that a way for women to deconstruct their position is through the practice of critical mimesis, that is, a miming back of the rules and regulations of the system that enabled feminine subjectivity in the first place. Irigaray (1991:123) states that:

[t]he scenography that makes representation feasible, representation as defined in philosophy, that is, the architectonics of its theatre, its framing of space-time, its geometric organisation, its props, its actors, their respective positions, their dialogues...that allows the logos, the subject, to reduplicate itself...have to be re-enacted... in order to shake discourse away from its mooring in the value of 'presence'...we have to point out how the break with material contiguity is made, how the system is put together, how the specular economy works.

This view resonates with Butler's stance (1990a) on 'gender as drag'. The improper or catachrestic use of language in written texts can perhaps assuage the omnipotence of phallic law, but I think that it is in the use and remarking of live flesh, in feminist performance art particularly, that critical mimesis takes place most effectively, for the site of language and struggles over power, the body, is paramount to feminist performance art. The feminist performance artist uses her body that is marked 'female' to mime femininity back across the flesh, against mimetic convention. It is in the literal interrogation of the 'architectronics' of the theatre space, the visible organisation of bodies in space and the mooring of logos to presence that I hope to clarify just how feminist performance art transgresses conventional theatrical time-space matrices and moves towards a kind of anti-aesthetic that could be referred to as 'the intensity of being' (that I might add incorporates the notion of becoming).<sup>10</sup> Hence, in the following section, I take a broad overview of historical gendered constructions of actual theatre spaces.

## **2.5 A (concise) historical overview of theatre space as gendered space**

The time-space antagonism of sexual difference has long been represented in the divisions of western theatre space. I begin with the example of the classical Greek theatre in which the division of gendered theatre space can be seen clearly in, for example, Aeschylus's tragedy *Agamemnon*. In such an example, female characters would be positioned upon the *skene*, which came to represent the threshold between the *oikos* and the *polls* (Scolnicov 1994). In classical culture, only a balance between the public and private realms would

I have taken the idea of the 'intensity of being' from Curtis (2000) who states: The sensible intuitions of space and time are intrinsic to the faculty of representation and pertain, therefore, to an interiority called the 'I think'. If [the] savage 'space-time' is to be conceived, then it needs to be approached in a different manner, something more akin to the Deleuzian spatium, a primal or groundless space prior to the passive synthesis performed by the 'I think', a depth Deleuze referred to as 'the intensity of being'.

appease the gods. Tragedy ensued if this balance was upset. In the example of *Agamemnon*, the destructive effects of war were seen to disrupt domestic harmony. The division between public (masculine) space and private (feminine) space in the classical theatre cannot be assumed to be uncritical nor hegemonic, but the point that I wish to make is that the material division of theatre space established a precedent for later historical conventions in theatrical design.

It should be noted that no actual women performed in the classical theatre, which to me at least begs the question of feminine, indeed gender artifice, for the male actor posing as female is in fact a drag artist of sorts. It also raises the issue of women's exclusion from the public medium of theatre whereby actual women are precluded from self-representation (let us not forget that the classical playwright is also male). I am of course assuming that there is always a trace of the writer's embodied subjectivity in the production of his text and that the privileging of the male subject over the authorship of space sublimates the traces of female embodiment.

Classical Greek and Ancient Roman theatre, and subsequently Medieval theatre, remained outdoors. Aside from thematic and stylistic differences in the theatre of these epochs, there remained an abiding interest in differentiating mimetic interior from exterior (Scolnicov 1994). Points of entry and exit were marked visually by doors, curtains, levels, stairs and vanishing points. Women in these, and ensuing theatre forms such as *Commedia dell'arte* and the Elizabethan theatre, tended to be confined to the theatrical private space behind the door or window of the 'house'. Women were in a sense conventionally hidden from the main stage to be creatures of allure and potential danger. As in the classical theatre, in the latter theatres it was at best taboo for women to perform and indeed illegal in the Elizabethan theatre.

Notably, in the Elizabethan theatre specifically, the window became a site for interaction between men and women, or at least male and female characters. Shakespeare's tragic heroine Juliet for example, is thus moved from the classical *skene* to become the prototypical female waiting at the window of her father's house where the amorous encounter with the romantic hero is staged. The window is a portal to the private interior of women's space, as is the door or the threshold. The entire space of the house, then, becomes eroticised in the sense that its private interiors are the site of penetration whilst

the female body that is analogous with the domestic interior is also inscribed as a penetrable entity, tied up with the language of property, ownership and sexual possession.

Theatrical space that is constructed within the picture frame or proscenium arch convention that developed in indoor Renaissance and Baroque theatres established a viewing frame that dominates even contemporary theatre design. The pros-arch arch design distances the audience and actors in a reiteration of the position of the disembodied observer whereby the gaze is not disrupted nor returned. The pros arch institutes the conceits of perspectival space in which "...each object has a measured and appropriate position within the whole'- a 'whole' produced by a single and immobile eye [I]" (Diamond 1997:5) Perspectival space relies upon the exclusion of the site/sight beyond a particular vanishing point. This treatment of space in effect negates sexual difference by instituting an aesthetic of taxonomic dualism whereby pre-Oedipal or maternal disorganisation is relegated to the realm of disorder and social pathology. In other words, the threat of difference or disorder is reorganised in the harmonious arrangements of a mimetic, theatrical world. The structure of the pros arch and perspectival harmony, then, sets up a sophisticated ritual of sorts whereby the phallogocentric order is reiterated. Perspectival staging also appeals to the ubiquitous taxonomic imagination as, in the systematic arrangement of objects, the object is selected and arranged within a closed system whereby the visible object is utilised as evidence of truth, closure and naturalised harmonies.

The painted court and garden scenes of the Renaissance and Baroque theatres gave way to the dissection of the domestic interior in the nineteenth century by realist playwrights, perhaps best exemplified by Ibsen (see Diamond 1997). The realists were intent upon breaking the so-called 'fourth wall' of the private interior in order to reflect society amidst the shifting social climate of post-industrial, modern-capitalist, imperialist Europe. The boundaries between private and public space softened as the micropolitics of the nuclear family became a subject for inquiry and in the realist theatre the dissolution of the fourth wall penetrated the domestic, previously feminine, space.

Although realism broke with the abstract universalisms of the beautiful and the sublime (to be discussed further in Chapter Three) characteristic of the Baroque and Romanticism, the causal logic of the Well Made play reiterated the tenets of perspectival

staging in supplying objects, testimony and narrative plot that came to stand in for truth (Diamond 1997). The ubiquitous well-made play privileges identifications, reflections and an Oedipal schema. So, although gendered power struggles may be represented in realism's reflections of the domestic sphere, these reflections result merely in an uncritical mimesis that does not interrogate the conditions of exclusion whereby representation functions. The subjects and the language mirrored by realism is decidedly phallic, which in effect reiterates the relegation of the female subject to the space-off of lack and excess whereby women's only recourse to the dominant symbolic is a negative hysteria.

The discourse on female hysteria was produced in light of the advances of nineteenth century biomedicine, emergent psychoanalysis, and theatre in which the bodily and psychic interior became a matter for scientific territorialisation. The uncontrollable urges, movements and desires displayed by the female hysteric were taken to be symptomatic of female pathology. Hysteria, as Diamond (1997:5) says, was a "trope *par excellence* for the ruination of truth making". So, the representation of the hysterical female body in these discourses was invested with the fascination and anxiety attached to the image of excessive or unbounded female movement and voice. Hysteria threatens the borders of a proper socialised body, a threat that is underpinned by the need for the full and proper subject to relieve castration anxiety and negate attachments to the maternal body. The hysterical body, as I will show, indicates a possibility for the ruination and re-making of (multiple) truths and has come to bear upon the deconstruction and re-making of contemporary *avant garde* theatre space.

### 2.5.i Shifting theatrical space

The criticism levelled at realism and the Well Made play was realised most effectively in the circles of *avant garde* modernism that incorporated the idea of hysteria as potentially iconoclastic. The reappraisal of the *bourgeois* theatre sounded a trend in experimental theatre towards historicism, as in Brecht's social theatre. On the other hand, the *avant garde* theatre, influenced heavily by surrealism, took a turn towards explorations of the chthonic and mysterious as exemplified in the writings of Artaud. The modernists were intent upon shattering realism's mirror, that is, in undoing realism's mimetic conventions it was assumed that 'reality' would be revealed to be all 'smoke and mirrors', a temporal illusion created in space. The deconstruction of grand historical narratives of 'truth' and

'reality' induced the hysterical body as a site of multiple truths and meanings: hysteria manifests as a radical dislocation of referents and signifiers, which was incorporated by the modernists in their rejection *inter alia* of perspectival composition in the organisation of theatrical space. This takes us a step closer, perhaps, to realising a feminist theatre praxis.

Scolnicov (1994:154) states that:

[t]he progressive movement of the theatrical space into the ever more intimate interior coupled with the gradual loosening of woman's bonds with that interior have brought about first the fruition and then the decomposition of one of the shaping ideas of western theatrical space...woman's special links with space, based on her privileged position in the home, have come to an end.

However, the 'progressive movement of the theatrical space...' *vis a vis* Scolnicov has not resulted in a resolution of the 'problem' of female embodiment, or in other words, the specific illusion of femininity that relies upon women *being* mirrors for masculine subjectivity (Irigaray 1985a). Indeed, Hirdman (1994:10) argues that the condition of the postmodern female body is one in which "...meanings of all kinds flow through the figures of women, presenting them as a means for communication of ideas and values, not always communicators themselves" (Hirdman 1994:10). Theatre, especially in its 'experimental' modernist forms, has certainly become more explicit, even scatological, but more often than not is used to stage crises in masculinity in which women remain as 'mirrors' and conduits for ideas, principles and language. The problem with 'being the mirror' is, to reiterate, that women retain their position of lack in the symbolic economy and thus have no way of reflecting female subjectivity, which remains the silenced (and/or hysterical) condition of masculinity.

It seems, then, that 'theatre' is an insufficient term or paradigm for feminists to work within, as its tendency towards ritual and symbolism reinstates the theatrical paradigm as particularly mute: without the reflexive moment, theatrical ritual "...does what it does without bringing what it is doing across the threshold of discourse or systematic thinking" (Faber 2002:87). Theatrical representation, or the "making visible again what is lacking or what has disappeared" (Diamond 1997:85) is embedded within phallic structures which "relieve, at the unconscious level, castration anxiety, and

at a cultural level reinscribes the authority of patriarchy" (*ibid*). If meanings do indeed flow symbolically through the bodies of women, then the female body is reproduced as a spectacle, as a site to be looked at without returning the gaze (here again Mulvey's 'male gaze' and masculine spectator come into play).

In feminist performance art, the power of the object to redouble or return the scrutinising gaze is exploited. The theatrical gaze is returned upon the spectator so that s/he is imbricated in the performance and the interpretation of the performer's body in time and space. Here 'performance' comes to mean something distinct from, yet related to, theatre. Diamond (1997) gives a comparative analysis between 'theatre' and 'performance' in which theatre "...is governed by the logos of the playwright's text; actors represent fictional entities of that text to produce a unique temporal and spatial framework or 'dramatic world'". Diamond (1997: 142) goes on to state that:

Theatre spectators are encouraged in pleasurable narrativity: prompted to identify with the psychological conflicts of individual subjects; to respond to the lure of suspense, reversal and deferral, to decode gestural and spectacular effects. Performance, on the other hand, dismantles textual authority, illusionism, the canonical actor in favour of the 'polymorphous thinking body' of the performer, a sexual, permeable, tactile body, a semiotic bundle of drives that scourges audience narrativity. In performance, linear, fictional time gives way to spatial intensities or projections of the performer's thought, gesture, movement and voice. Theatre, the art of representation, transforms this polymorphous, drive-ridden, repressed, instinctual, —can we call it official— body into what Roland Barthes calls an 'emphatic formal body', frozen by its function as an artificial object.

The theatrical body is thus conceived of as an *auratic* body and, like the art object, eschews completion, wholeness and integration, in a word, *presence*.<sup>11</sup> It has been established in Chapter One that the presence of the subject and his language can never be guaranteed, for neither ultimately 'arrive'. However, the illusion of presence is maintained in the body of the theatrical actor and his/her appeal to the authority of written text. Contrary to this, performance art attempts to undo the fabrications of presence in order to

<sup>11</sup> Diamond (1997: 143-42) uses Walter Benjamin's term 'aura' to denote " the esoteric presence of the artwork before technologies of reproduction".

re-write the body quite literally. In so doing, performance art emphasises *temporality*. The emphasis on the temporal in performance art shifts teleological constructions of time in order to be "[receptive] both to the contingency of the present and to mimetic figurations of what we might call historical experience" (Diamond 1997:143).

The practice of using the auratic body as a reflexive device has been used by performance artists since the 1960s: the body seems to guarantee presence and yet Diamond's notion of the 'polymorphous thinking body' infers that a single identity cannot arrive at any given moment. *I* is constantly remade and disappears; a stable / can only be guaranteed by the repression or loss of alterity. It is notable that the narrative / has been a constant in feminist performance art since its inception in the 1970s as "a means of inciting the expectation of narrativity only to displace it" (Diamond 1997:152). This contradiction is productive in challenging the aforementioned Oedipal theatrical structure because the turn to the personal pronoun / enables the interrogation of the conditions of becoming a full and proper subject. Irigaray (1985b, 1991, 2002) argues that female morphology precludes the exclusive speech of an /, and that identarian systems actually deface feminine duplicity or the double time of female embodiment. Thus I argue that when female performance artists invoke the narrative /, they use the term reflexively as a temporary, strategic position from which to historicise the psychic and social conditions whereby their identities as 'women' have been produced and resisted. The reflexive criticism of the historical category 'woman' in feminist performance art is a discursive shift away from 'theatre' in that the historical is invoked without privileging a teleological narrative (that is constructed in terms of linearity and fulfilment). Theatre, for Diamond (1997:143), purges time by arranging narrative, character and space in teleological relationships whereby "the play... imitates the timely in order to remove it from time, to give it shape" (*ibid*). The process of *performance*, then, opens up the possibility for women to re-work and re-author the shapes, contours and spatial pathways of their (specifically female) flesh.

The reworking of the signifier 'woman' in feminist performance art has also destabilised the borderline between 'life' and 'art', specifically in the use of non-theatre spaces to stage performances. Public spaces, including recent interventions in virtual space, (see Goldberg 1998, Kaye 2000) have been recuperated by feminist performance artists as sites for intervention in the production of hegemonic feminine identities and as sites whose meanings can be reinscribed by the temporal actions of the embodied female subject. The

critical, feminist use of the *explicit* female body as a public medium has also destabilised the margins between embodied experience and biomedical, psychanalytic and aesthetic norms and structures.

These transgressive acts, I argue, destabilise the exclusive authority of the symbolic and its phallic institutions and thus contribute to the reconceptualisation of the subject as always already fractured, dispersed and temporarily located. In turn, the cultural centrality of canonical knowledge structures is destabilised and shown up to be immanent, interpretive and stained with the residue of its producers. Thus, the authority over space of the ahistorical, transcendent, universal intellectual can no longer be guaranteed whilst the possibility for 'the other', in this case women, to reinscribe space and their bodies is opened up.

## **Conclusion**

It is clear that the hierarchical relationship between concepts of time and space have established a historical connection between the gendered body and cultural agency and authorship. The feminist performance artist thus enters the discursive space of performance against the grain of biomedical, social and aesthetic frameworks that have inscribed the female body. Performance art draws upon the theatrical paradigm, that is, visibility, in order to undermine its masculinist, Oedipalised imperatives and reinscribe social spaces and the surface/interior of female subjectivity.

As has been seen in Chapter Two, one of the key ways of controlling space is via delineation and exclusion. It is with this in mind that I turn to a discussion of the canonical structure in Chapter Three, as the canon is a discursive structure that reiterates the logic of the monological imaginary and its inside/outside dichotomy whereby spaces of cultural exclusivity and the admission of selected subjects and objects is normalised. The canonical structure, and I will be interrogating the theatrical canon in particular, serves to negate sexual difference and institutes exclusive masculine creativity in the production of cultural forms. This structure is bound to the spatialisation of the female body as the canonical structure bars the contributions of the feminine subject from its boundaries.

**Fig. 1** Illustration from Justine Siegmund: *Die konigl. preussische und churbrandenb* (1723) Foetus being removed from a womb; illustration in a midwifery manual (Shildrick 1997:41)

**Fig. 2** J.F. Gautier d'Agoty (eighteenth century). Anatomical painting of female figures with infants and foetus in utero (Shildrick 1997:40)



## Chapter Three

### A phallus by another name: the canon

#### Introduction

The canon is a cultural structure of exclusion and privilege. The unfinished, the temporal and the subject in process are displaced in the canon by the aesthetic object which is necessarily a completed work or artifact. I contend that the abject maternal body is sublimated by canonical structures in an attempt to exclude the female subject from producing representational texts. The maternal, as it is inscribed within phallic economies, threatens castration and the disruption of the mono-vocal authority of the phallic symbolic. The discourse of the same, which I will discuss, (re)produces the canon. The canon assimilates the maternal in its visual and verbal structures so that representations of female bodies in particular are sedimented in terms of the canon's aesthetic structures; that is, the female body must 'measure up' to a preordained aesthetic standard.

The bodies of women are typically represented in canonical literature, fine art and theatre as spectacles that lack agency and moral individualism. In this chapter, I will discuss the structure of the canon before outlining some theories of canonical critique. I then shift the discussion to look at the elision of the female body with the maternal and the repression of the maternal within canonical structures. Throughout this chapter I want to trace the ways in which canonical structures inscribe cultural production with the phallic mark and in so-doing, deface the particularities and potential vocality of female embodiment. In particular, I want to look at performance art as a form that transgresses the paradigms or borderlines of the dramatic canon in particular, and as productive of feminist discourse. In the final section of Chapter Three, I will consider how feminist performance art practice might disrupt the hegemony of dramatic canons via discursive deconstruction and reflexive critique of representational technologies. In turn, I cannot ignore the problems that are inherent in the explicit use of female flesh in performance art. The female body is such an overdetermined site of cultural abjection and fascination that shifting the frame of viewing is fraught with the risk of reinscribing the structures of patriarchal domination that produce the feminine subject as a sexualised object.

### 3.1 A definition of 'the canon'

The term 'canon' is derived from the Greek *kanon*, which means 'rule' or 'standard' (Pollock 1999:3). The term invokes the power of symbolic law and social organisation. Thus, texts and artifacts that have been approved by and accepted into the canon both constitute and set the standard for it. This circularity circumscribes western artistic production. A cultural canon functions within the logic of an inside/outside opposition: texts and artifacts that are selected or recognised by the canon are constituted as the objects of artistic mastery that are admitted into the canon. Because artistic canons have been defined by those who have been advantaged historically, in terms of material and symbolic supremacy (a ubiquitous heterocentric white male identity group) artistic canons effectively legitimate and reinforce the analogy of white, heterosexual males with culture (and relegate women to the realm of nature). ~ Pollock (1999:9) reinforces this claim when she defines the canon as "...a discursive formation which constitutes the objects/texts it selects as the products of artistic mastery" which essentially "...contributes to the legitimization of white masculinity's exclusive identification with creativity and culture". Clearly, the bounded structure of the canon also privileges the unified, rational subject that, as we have seen in Chapter One, is produced within phallogentric imaginary. Like the fixed phallic signifier, the canon and its aesthetic standards supposedly pre-exist that structure. The standard text or object of artistic mastery should thus itself be bounded and bear no trace to its maker. Due to the inscription of the female body as lacking in discretionary boundaries, artistic mastery, like the rational mastery of the individual, eludes the feminine subject.

In the western collective unconscious, the artistic genius or auteur who is included in the canonical structure is firmly embedded (and I intend to pun) in homosexual fantasies that erect a generative paternal figure, god or artistic genius, as the imagined source of creation and creativity. The creative genius (the artist) in this sense displaces the power of the maternal body to produce life itself and takes us back to the production of a problematic subject in the Oedipal narrative. It is apparent that canonical standards and traditions are built around a biased selection process that renders female artists an

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that statements that identify a 'group' such as 'white heterosexual males' are not intended as a reversed misogyny (ie. misandry) but instead point to a particular *version* of masculinity, powerfully entrenched, that has in turn enabled the production of negative versions of femininity.

exception to the rule. In theatrical canons, it is no coincidence that the majority of highly trained, well-funded and influential practitioners are western-educated white men. Surely it is not merely coincidental that the academy is based upon a historical affiliation with the works of European male academics, artists, philosophers and scientists. The gender, sexuality and race of the artistic genius or the auteur is not problematised in mainstream criticism because the supreme indifference of the heterocentric, masculine voice is assumed. The structural borderlines of the canon foreclose the immanence and corporeality of the particular, gendered body. The particular, gendered body is pushed aside both in the production of the artistic persona and in modes of representation that reproduce dominant modes of signification.

The canon is steeped in ideals of regulated beauty and form. The aesthetic standards of the canon are assuredly sexuate, although *vis a vis* Kantian aesthetic judgement, the appeal to natural and universal phenomena in producing these standards sublimate the gender biases that underpin them. According to Alberro (2004), Kant divides the aesthetic into the artificial dichotomies of the beautiful and the sublime. In the presence of beauty, the human subject experiences a pleasurable sense of alignment between the faculties of the mind and the mind's experience of reality. The turmoil of the sublime exceeds sense, measure and order; the subject is "powerfully made aware of its own limitations" (*ibid*). These aesthetic categories, however, have been associated with the masculine and feminine respectively, the female body having been thought of as disorganised and disruptive. This categorical division of the aesthetic into the beautiful and the sublime serves to explain the division of representations of the canonical female between the beautiful and sublime: the 'beautiful' female is necessarily passive (already castrated), fetishised and her body classically closed, smooth and young. She is to be found in the dramatic canon typically fainting, weeping or dead (I am thinking of 'unfortunate females' such as Ophelia or Juliet). The "Bad Sublime" (Zeglin Brand 1995: 43) on the other hand, is the quintessential castrating female who takes on the form of the witch, whore, monster, murderess, temptress or demonic woman whose overt sexuality and/or corporeal excess (*grotesquerie* really) is threatening and simultaneously fascinating (such figures as Medea, the Medusa, Sphinx and Salome are recalled here). Griselda Pollock suggests that horrific female figures, and here Pollock refers particularly to the representation of lesbian and prostitutional bodies, are used by male artists to displace the maternal, so as to reclaim a virile and autogenic creativity that has no debt to a maternal figure or origin (Pollock 1999:35). The sublime female is not merely an historical figure.

Alberro (2004:38) argues that a resurgence of the demand for the beautiful object in contemporary contexts is indicative of a nostalgia for pre-modernist aesthetic sensibilities that valorise a Kantian notion of different types of aesthetic experience (Alberro 2004:38). I would suggest that the 'cult of beauty' in the arts indicates also a nostalgia for the promulgation of the feminine ideal as commodity-object and the conservative patriarchal framework that guarantees such a construct.

I have been speaking about the representation of the female body specifically in dramatic and artistic texts, but in terms of the structure of canonical, written dramatic texts, there is certainly also a bias towards the phallic imaginary that forecloses the maternal. The Aristotlean dramatic structure that is the blueprint for 'good' drama is premised upon the inside/outside dichotomy, or the difference between open/closed. The Aristotlean drama focuses on narrative coherence and closure which reasserts the desirability of aesthetic closure/harmony/resolution. This aesthetic, I argue, disguises the traces of the text's production so that there is one (phallogocentric) authorial voice that prescribes the narrative trajectory, from introduction to climax to denouement. This really begs the question of whether narrative closure is a necessary condition of a dramatic text or whether this structure really just reinscribes phallic authority in the guise of universal moral lessons. I would add that Aristotle himself considered women to be *alogos* or without reason and hence incapable of making rational judgements. In *The Generation of Animals*, he cautions that women, because their bodies can change shape in pregnancy and childbearing, are morphologically dubious. For Aristotle, the lack of stable form means that women by default share with the monster the abnormality that evokes both the horror and fascination which psychoanalytic theory takes as the "fundamental structure of the mechanism of desire" (Braidotti 1999:33). Being *alogos*, of course, precludes women from artistic mastery. Lest we think that Aristotle's thinking has no bearing upon modern thought, Kant argued that aesthetic judgement must be "disinterested". However, the immanence of the female precludes her from producing such judgements about standards of taste. Kant finds women's opinions quite tasteless in itself: a woman who "has a head full of Greek" or who "indulges in arguments about mechanics...might as well even have a beard" (Zeglin Brand 1995: 92). In short, a knowledgeable woman is ugly. It is such thinking that has established the canon as a structure that excludes women on the grounds of dubious (Shildrick (1997) uses the term 'leaky' corporeality and assumed moral and aesthetic ineptitude).

### 3.2 Critiquing the Canon

Cultural analysis that does not appeal to transcendent, universal aesthetic standard panics the discourses of scientific rationalism and instrumental reason, so esteemed of Enlightenment discourse, that appeal to empirical data and abstract universalisms to support exclusionary racist, homophobic and sexist dogma. Suffice to say, if the producer of a cultural text is female, non-white, queer or physically disabled, then their bodily identity is paramount to the categorisation of their art, long before they are in any danger of being labelled a genius. As has been stated, embodied knowledges challenge abstract universalisms and the privileged doctrine of the Cartesian mind-body split. As I will show in my discussion of several feminisms' approaches to canonical critique, merely bringing women into the enclosure of "culture" is not sufficient for the project of transgressing the rules of patriarchal discursive structures. Rupturing phallographic representational systems surely cannot result from a flattening out of sexual difference via a redistribution of power, a mechanism that shores up hegemonic structures. The small number of women who are drawn into the structures of the canon might enjoy some recognition and economic benefit. However, the inside/outside mentality that legitimates the operation of canonical structures simply remains unchallenged and unchanged by strategies of assimilation. The myth of exclusive patrilineal creativity is barely disturbed, let alone disrupted, by the mere *influence* of a few female artists who are assimilated under the terms of an identifiable feminine aesthetic.

Feminist cultural practitioners, including performance artists, are intent on challenging and disrupting the processes of cultural reproduction that reinforce the values of patriarchy, and so I will pursue a brief discussion and critique of some different feminisms' theoretical approaches to enjoining or disrupting cultural analysis and production. It is important to theorise differences in feminism/s so that feminism as a politics remains mobile and reflexively critical. Difference in feminist or women's practice and theory can be viewed as a resource rather than a threat to feminists because it offers the opportunity of widening out the field of points of resistance to patriarchy. Moreover, feminism, like the signifier "woman", will only reproduce masculine-identified positions and politics if it becomes dogmatic and closed to difference. In the same vein, it would not be at all useful to the struggle with patriarchy to produce a feminist canon, for this canon would merely be a phallus by another name.

### 3.2.i Feminisms and the canon

I will discuss and critique three main branches of feminism that have made significant contributions to critique of the canon before I go on to discuss, in some detail, poststructuralist deconstructions of the canon. The first feminism that I cite is an offshoot from liberal humanist philosophy. *Liberal feminism* stresses "women's parity with men, based on universal values" (Austin 1990:5), and the sovereignty of the individual. Liberal feminists view canons as a "structure of exclusion" (Pollock 1999:23). Liberal feminism's strategy in bringing about gender equality is to change the face of the dramatic canon by introducing more female-authored texts and productions into the canon. However, merely incorporating women's work into any canon does not necessarily challenge nor change the structure of the canon. Liberal feminism fails to recognise that women can be masculine-identified and thus replicate and reify the already-existing structures and styles of artistic canons. Passing on the phallus, as it were, does not position women to articulate against cultural oppression and negates differences between women.

*Radical feminism* is a separatist politics that positions women as innately different from men. The position of radical feminists is that the canon is a structure of subordination and domination by men and masculinist aesthetics which relativises all women by positioning them within the power structures of race, gender, class and sexuality. Radical feminists address the idea of a "female aesthetic" and of the necessity of constructing an exclusively female culture in order for women to realise themselves. In the broad category of radical feminism are other separatist feminisms, such as cultural feminism, which posits that women are both different from and superior to men. Such fundamentalist thinking is based on absolute gender categories and can be criticised for relying on biological determinist arguments to support claims of women's superiority and innate difference from men. In terms of women's performance, radical and cultural feminism identify a similarity in the plays and performances written, choreographed, performed and produced by women. These feminisms look for a through-line or common female aesthetic that informs the idea of an exclusive female culture. The major issue with this approach is that by defining women categorically, radical feminism "...confirms the patriarchal notion that woman is the sex, the sign of gender, perpetually the particular and sexualised other to the universal sign Man" (Pollock 1999:24).

I do not view working with the idea of sexed specificity, as a move away from abstract universalisms, as problematic. However, it is limiting to view feminine difference as biologically *determined*. A radical line of argument would insist that feminists should not have to concern themselves with men or masculinity at all nor privilege what the "patriarchal notion" (*ibid*) [of women/culture] might be. This argument assumes that women can have access to women's culture that pre-exists assimilation into patriarchal structures. However, the ontology that underpins performance itself assumes the innate possibilities of transgressing fixed or biologically determined identity, exemplified for instance in acts of cross-dressing. Attempting to group women's cultural production in terms of similarities cannot, for one, be guaranteed by sex and, secondly, it can be argued that these similarities could just as well exist between women's work because women are defined culturally *contra* men.

*Materialist feminism* is concerned with how gender difference is constructed by material conditions, that is, how women as a *class* or socio-economic group have been "oppressed by material conditions and social relations" (Austin 1990:5). Materialist feminism holds that women across the board are considered inferior to men and this stratification of society on a gendered level makes it more difficult for women to access material resources. Whilst women may not have access to material resources, they nevertheless contribute to the production of material through their labour. Materialist feminism has links to Marxist philosophy, but it emphasises women as an oppressed class through all strata of social organisation. Materialist feminism emphasises that women's issues necessarily involve questions of race, social class and sexual preference. In terms of theatre, materialist feminists are concerned with the material and historical conditions that allow the production of texts or plays. So then, in order for theatrical canons to change, materialist feminism argues that the material conditions that support the myth of "woman" must be changed. Who performs and produces theatre, how, and why, are affected by material conditions. These aforementioned conditions determine the way in which sex, gender, race and social class are represented: if one has access to material resources it allows access to a wider set of possibilities for representation, whether through, for example, dress, lifestyle, partners or, indeed, the ability to create and sustain performance projects. Materialist feminism has an appeal in a developing nation such as South Africa, where material conditions come to bear heavily upon the construction of

subjectivities. The feminisation of poverty means that women in South Africa (and many other African countries) remain excluded from contributing to cultural production, that is, lack of resources and the relegation of women to economically disempowered positions makes it difficult for women to represent themselves. So, despite differences in social and racial class, it is assumed that the material conditions of women result in the perpetuation of an inferior gendered class. However, although material conditions determine the sustainability of a particular class, it is insufficient that women's positions be explained only in terms of materialism: having access to resources that allow women to produce theatre and performance in no way guarantees a challenge to patriarchies. The effect may be merely cosmetic. An effective deconstruction of patriarchy needs to be undertaken at a material *and* symbolic level so that material effects and knowledges shift. These are issues that I will continue to problematise throughout the remainder of this chapter.

*Post structuralist feminism* moves away from the essentialist tendencies of the three former feminisms. Poststructuralist feminists (see Weedon 1997) view power relations and knowledge production as discursively produced, that is, produced within a discursive field. " The discursive construction of language and the construction of the subject in language is central to poststructuralist theory's understanding of discourse as historically and culturally contingent. Not all discourses carry equal weight or power, and certainly the masculinist discourses that have constructed the female body have tended to medicalise and pathologise female bodies to the exclusion of other possible readings and at the cost of other modes of representation. Poststructuralist analysis is concerned with power structures and power relations, and at its most basic level, poststructuralist feminism is concerned with power relations between women and men and the discursive structures (material and symbolic) that reproduce these relations. Power in this instance is not located in an identifiable, repressive monolith but enables and produces the subject as such. Feminist poststructuralists locate the oppression of women in masculinist discourses that include grand historical narratives, psychoanalysis, politics, biomedicine, literature, art and theatre. However, this deconstructive approach does not include an assumption that 'woman' has an essential and unfettered position that is beyond

" The concept of 'discursive fields, developed in the work of Foucault, is explained by Weedon (1997:34) who states that discursive fields consist of "...competing ways of organising social institutions and processes". However, the concept of a 'discursive field' is dynamic and hence its meaning and the interpretation of Foucault's thinking on the matter may be contested.

patriarchal domination but that patriarchy produces particular and negative versions of femininity in its discursive operations. Poststructuralist analysis is useful insofar as the deconstruction of discursive formations can lead to "the production of radically new knowledges" (Pollock 1999:26). This is because no central meaning or truth is assumed to exist in any given text but that specific power relations determine the kinds of cultural production that take place in a society. Thus, the subjects, meanings and material excluded from dominant texts can be read into the frame of dominance. Poststructuralist analysis moves across a field of discourse, cultural texts and their psychic foundations in order to deconstruct existing power relations and imagine possibilities beyond these. (Note that the term "text", unless specified, can refer to anything from the body to a play to day-to-day activities). By drawing on a broad range of texts, analysis is also rendered more complex, which enables the researcher to "render a thick description..." of the issue at hand.<sup>14</sup> This explains why I have not used a formalist methodology to analyse the performance artists included in Part Two but have drawn upon a variety of critical discourses in order to theorise what these artists' bodies are 'saying'. Poststructuralism's multifocal methodology is antithetical to the production of canons or standards because the 'measure' is considered relative to its production within a matrix of discursive relations and is thus not viewed as the result of a prediscursive or fixed origin.

A poststructuralist analysis of the body offers the possibility of reclaiming the female body from classical and homogenising forms of representation. This process of reclamation comes from re-reading cultures not for universal truths (about women's bodies specifically), but for particularities in the structures of power that reinforce social hegemony. The emphasis that poststructuralism places on historical analysis, appropriated broadly from Foucault's term 'genealogy', can offer a form of resistance to historical narratives that silence the voices of marginalised identity groups that "lie a little beneath history" (Sawicki 1991:28).<sup>15</sup> Dramatic/artistic canons, in poststructuralist feminist analysis, are read as institutions whose textual structure is "an enunciation of western masculinity" (Pollock 1992:26). By deconstructing the material,

<sup>1</sup> I have borrowed the term "thick decription" from Dr Claudia Ford's lecture on violence, sexual violence and child rape in South Africa (*Issues of Consequence: Why Do I Scream At God For The Rape of Babies?*, presented at the Winter School, Grahamstown National Arts Festival, 2 July 2005). Dr Ford used the term "thick description" with reference to the effective results of interdisciplinary research, such that "interdisciplinarity consists in creating something new that belongs to no-one".

" Sawicki provides examples of "marginal and submerged voices", such as the "voices of the mad, delinquent, abnormal and disempowered" (Sawicki 1991:28).

symbolic and historical conditions of canonical structures, the way in which representations of male bodies are *produced* can be traced. This frees the body up from notions of fixity and, I argue, enables the production of discourses that represent alterity or otherness that transgresses phallic necessity.

Poststructuralist feminist theory offers a methodology, that is, a technique or conceptual framework, for reading bodies, cultures and change. It does not offer a solution for emancipating all women everywhere. In terms of the application of poststructuralist feminism to deconstructing performance, it is a particularly useful framework precisely because it does not fall back upon abstract universalisms and generalisation that inform the production of canonical theatrical works, works that enunciate the intelligibility of the female body as an object of aesthetic contemplation or negated abjection. Rather, the body viewed from the point of poststructuralist feminist deconstruction is a text that is produced by the interweaving, so to speak, of various discursive threads. The female body (in performance) and the aesthetic object, then, are never neutral entities, but are invested with the fears and expectations of the dominant phallic imaginary that sublimates alterity.

### **3.3 The textual-maternal or reproducing the other as the same**

Women are not absent in a nominal sense from the artistic and dramatic canon: women are certainly re-presented in dramatic texts. It is not the lack of representation in the dramatic canon that is problematic, but the way in which the phallogentric imaginary reproduces the sign of woman as ontologically dubious— at once lacking and excessive. Garner (1994:188) states that traditional western stagings of the female body "...both derealise its subjective presence and rematerialise it as sexualised object", thereby negating the potential of a desiring, female subject that does not signify lack. The canon is also not representative (in the demographic sense) of women as cultural practitioners: as has been said 'women's art' is valued in terms of its inferior status to canonical masculine forms. The phallic economy functions via categorical identarian thinking which "besets its object" (Golding 1997:14). The object is either marked as valuable or left unmarked. Phelan (1993) maintains that this binary system marks the masculine term with value whilst the feminine is left unmarked. The masculine term is thus unremarkable, it is the normative

and universal term. The unmarked object, the feminine, is remarked as other and the lesser term. The female body, remarked as such, becomes a means for homosocial exchange.

The female body is simultaneously the site of scopical fascination, that is, invested in a regime of visibility, and the site of fear that results in the sublimation of excess or duplicity that is produced as ubiquitous with female nature and anatomy. Thus, according to Phelan (*ibid*), the other is converted into the familiar grammar of the linguistic, visual and physical body of the same, which means that difference is disavowed (this argument has clear links to Irigaray's thinking on the subject of sexual difference). Sexual difference is thus fixed under the masculine term where it becomes naturalised and standardised and the body of the other becomes a fetish object. I think that both for Phelan and Irigaray, we can read 'difference' as sexual difference across a range of gender identifications, but my feminist bias in this thesis means that I have focussed on how women are othered and fetishised. Suffice to say that in the process of fetishisation the female body is sexualised, which in effect equates woman with (biological) sex.

My argument is that the production of phallic texts of a standard sufficient to be admitted to the canon are premised upon the negation of difference and particularly the maternal. However, it is unnecessary to look for signs of a known femininity in cultural texts as this approach assumes an essential, universal gendered style or aesthetic. Rather, a poststructuralist approach means looking for: "signs of femininity's structurally conditioned and dissonant struggle with phallogentrism" (Pollock 1999:33). That is, it is possible to produce subversive readings of canonical works by reading for the blind spots in these works or, in other words, reading against the grain so as to produce an account of the alterity or otherness that ghosts the phallogentric-canonical text. I turn to a discussion of the maternal as a powerful trope of cultural abjection and negation and argue that reading for the maternal across the board opens up a field of options for feminist theory and practice.

### 3.3.i Reading for the maternal: the lost mother

Kristeva (1986:99) views the maternal as the primary structuring principle of a dominant masculine genre in the process of signification, as she states in the following:

We live in a civilisation in which the consecrated (religious or secular) representation of femininity is subsumed under maternity. Under close examination, however, this maternity turns out to be an adult (male and female) fantasy of a lost continent: what is involved, moreover, is not so much an idealised primitive mother as an idealisation of the unlocalisable relationship between her and us, an idealisation of primary narcissism (emphasis in original).

*One* cannot enter the symbolic order until there is a rejection and differentiation between self and other, because the subject-object relation that forms the primary structure of language, at least according to Kristeva, cannot be established until this differentiation takes place. To reiterate Kristeva's position, dealt with in further detail in Chapter One, the infant learns that the substances that are dejected from the body are not the same as the body/self. This detritus defines the subject by being constituted as the not-subject: my excrement, for example, shows me what / am not. The maternal body is rejected as a site of infantile *jouissance* or multiple and unconstituted drives and polymorphous pleasures in order for the speaking subject to be realised. The problem for women within a phallic culture is that the female body is conflated with the maternal, so that in effect all representations of the female body are substitutes for a (narcissistic) cultural fantasy. The problem, too, is that as *the* primary object, the maternal body is also an abject body, its processes that are necessary for life itself pushed into the realm of negative abjection.<sup>16</sup> This foundational fantasy also structures the production of masculinist culture that is based upon the loss, repression or murder of the maternal wherein the maternal is negated as a by-product or container but not contributive to signification. The elsewhere of the maternal is always the elsewhere that is not represented or is *unrepresentable* in phallogentric cultural forms. This is because not only does the maternal present a threat to an exclusive patrilineal genealogy, but the maternal also holds the promise of a return to the unlocalisable, undivided *jouissance* of narcissistic infantile pleasure (a state prior to entry into the symbolic order). The female body, conflated with the maternal, threatens the ruin of representation because she is always already other. The western dramatic canon, that is premised upon exclusion and homogeneity, must negate the maternal in order to maintain the position of the masculine creative genius that has no debt to a maternal figure or origin.

<sup>16</sup> Kristeva (1982:1-2) defines the abject as follows: *The abject is not an object facing me, which I name or imagine [ ]the abject has only one quality of the object- that of being opposed to L.. from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master...to each ego its object, to each superego its abject.*

The structure of the canon, by definition, relies upon exclusion and reiterates the ideology of exclusive, bounded subjectivity.

Reading for the maternal means reading against the grain of patriarchal texts for the incomplete repression of the feminine or the abject that is displaced into the margins of hegemonic discourse. Such resistant readings are not recuperative in the sense that any authentic feminine voice can be 'revealed', but these are valuable because they enable, for one, the deconstruction of how the other is repressed and marginalised. Furthermore, reading against the grain enables the conceptualisation of mobile imaginary spaces that are available in the interstices of institutions and the power-knowledge apparatus. Here I recall Foucault's (1976) concept of resistance, that is, that resistance is immanent in the functioning of power. Thus, there are multiple voices immanent in any discourse. Here we can see why it is important that feminism teases out the many voices that are immanent in texts and does not set out to define one authentic system of representation for women. Constructing polyvocal cultural narratives serves to challenge the reproduction of the other-as-the-same: in undermining the master narrative that appeals to visibility as a guarantee of truth, the ontology of the Real is challenged. That is, the myth that language can give access to a Real that pre-exists linguistic construction is exploded by multiplicity and contradiction inherent in a polylogue of disparate voices.

I contend that the use of the live body in performance art transgresses the border between the discrete aesthetic object and subject in process which in turn challenges the production of closed and discrete systems of language, knowledge and identity. Because performance art is a body-centred form, that is, the body is an explicit site of performance, it is imaginable that we can talk of producing discourse in these acts that forms "a hiatus in the very possibility for cultural reproduction" (Haver in Golding 1997:284). Perhaps this is a rather Utopian view, as the performing body is beset with the problem of reception: the female body in performance takes up an ambiguous status because the performer works both with and against dominant modes of representation. If feminist performance art is to transgress phallogentric canonical structures "in their diverse formations and varying systems of representation" (Pollock 1993:33), then performance cannot merely reinscribe the maternal onto the body but must surely show up the patriarchal/phallogentric "...presumptions governing its contexts and

commitments" (Grosz 1995:22) and suggest that the fixing of the maternal in terms of negative repression is endemic to phallic economies. Further, using the sexually specific female body as tool for cultural inscription can serve to undermine the ubiquity of the phallus with the production of signification and cultural authorship. In the phallogocentric symbolic, the phallus not only guarantees the authority (the presence) of the speaking subject, but comes to signify active desire whilst the feminine subject is relegated to the passive position of desired object. We are confronted again by the problem of sexual difference and desire.

### 3.3.ii *Differance*, difference, and desire

Derrida's term *differance* refers to the inability of language to be what it promises, that is, the signifier is never identical with the signified. *Differance* means both difference and deferral and refers to the idea that nothing, no word, idea, text or subject is identical with itself. The moment that something is thought, said, written, intended or performed, it is no longer itself or present. In this way, truth, meaning, identity and presence are constantly deferred and never arrive (Fortier 1997:63-64). Feminist deconstruction largely assumes that ideas such as meaning and presence do not hold truth nor integrity. Thus, canonical works, literary, dramatic or visual, are not impervious to a feminist textual analysis nor is the transcendent authority of the phallus guaranteed. When feminists speak of difference, it is linked to the idea of *differance*, that is, the slippage of meaning in language, but refers to sexual difference specifically. Sexual difference is suppressed by the phallic (the law of the same). Irigaray argues that the female body is a site of perpetual *differance*, such that oneness or the same cannot hold. Irigaray links the female sex to a symbolic multiplicity that makes it impossible for the female body to ever be identified as it were:

the/a woman who does not have one sex—which will usually have been interpreted as meaning no sex— cannot subsume herself under one term, generic or specific. Body, breasts, pubis, clitoris, labia, vulva, vagina, neck of the uterus, womb... and this nothing which already makes them take pleasure in/from their apartness thwarts their reduction to any concept. Woman's sexuality cannot therefore be inscribed as such in any theory... (Irigaray1991:59).

Irigaray's statement, that woman's sexuality cannot be inscribed in theory, is not intended to negate feminist theory. In fact, it is an injunction to theorise, but not at the cost of monologic indifference, for this reinforces the idea of woman as the lacking side of a masculine-feminine binary pair. The interpretation of not-one-sex as no sex is problematic because, as I have already stated, this constitutes women as lacking and as the mere mirror or container for masculine desire, possession and exchange. I return to Irigaray to explain the psychic economy that positions the phallus/penis as primary signifier in structures of social exchange and in so-doing, negates sexual difference:

[the meaning of the clitoris and of motherhood] was thought of in the pleasure of apartness, and from other pleasures too... Their meaning, as with anything to do with female desire, having been assigned them by self-representation of (so-called) male sexuality. Which, inevitably, serve as models, units of measurement and guarantors of economic progress for anyone sensible. Its necessarily trinitarian structure included: subject, object and the copula-instrument of their articulation...The bosom of mother-nature permitting the conjunction of the (male) one and the (so-called) other in the matrix of discourse (Irigaray 1991:59-60).

It has already been established that, as Irigaray points out in the above passage, there is a phallic sexual code that governs the production of signification and hence cultural forms. This code or set of rules of exchange does not allow women a signifier of their own with which to articulate their desire because women are already always other, reproduced as the same. This means that "women are forced to address the phallus/penis as the only flag of sex" (Chisholm1995:24). The phallic sexual code that governs texts also governs canonical dramatic texts, and as in masculinist literary texts, dramatic texts are structured to foreground masculine (phallic) desire, conquest, movement and agency. The female body that cannot express its own desire (because the female can only address the phallus/penis as the referent of desire) is relegated to the position of wanting-to-be-desired. Indeed, in Lacan's phallic schema, woman signifies the desire to be desired, whilst the male actively desires women in the trinitarian structure of object, subject, and the authoritative or active phallus. It is not so much *who* he desires that matters in the triangulated structure of masculine desire, that is, whether men desire women or men, but *how* that exchange of

desire takes place. That is, masculine desire is positioned as active and feminine as latent and passive. In a simplistic formulation, women wait whilst men do.

The phallic schema that governs the production of texts is inextricable from flesh and embodiment. The myth that women are in fact castrated or thwarted males, as has been seen in the discussion of the *chora* and biomedicine in Chapter Two, has held sway in various manifestations over the western imagination for centuries. Female sexual passivity has been instituted in psychoanalytic discourse, after Freud's account of the development of 'normal', passive female sexuality, that sees 'her' move from experiencing active arousal and pleasure in the clitoris to passive vaginal intercourse (Creed 1995:96). Evident in these examples is that female genitalia, particularly the clitoris, are perceived as threatening to phallic supremacy and are thus subdued under the phallic mark. The clitoris, within the phallic sexual and symbolic code, is not only obfuscated, but is a threat to the autocracy of the phallus. Given that women have been seen as failed or castrated men, it is not surprising that desire has been thought of as the territory of masculinity. The potential activity of the clitoris is threatening to the myth of male sexual dominance. Historical examples of what I would define as gynophobia abound: it was not unusual, up to the nineteenth century, for tribades (the term 'lesbian' was not yet in use) who practised supposedly penetrative sex with their enlarged clitorises to be burnt or undergo a clitoridectomy (*ibid*). Women diagnosed as hysterical (by definition having an uncontrollable sexuality) or suffering from nymphomania in nineteenth century Europe were not infrequently treated by having the clitoris removed in order to pacify them. Ritual clitoridectomy continues to be practised in heavily patriarchal African and Islamic cultures (Dillenberg 2004). As can be surmised from these examples, the active clitoris, signifying active sexual arousal and desire, is thus inscribed as dangerous, volatile and inappropriately masculine. Female desire is untenable within phallographic discourse because sexual difference is subsumed under the masculine term.

The history of female genital mutilation is not only literal, but has been practised in western patriarchies via the textual negation of female desire in discourses of

<sup>17</sup> Perhaps homophobia is symptomatic of a displaced misogyny in that homosexual men are feminised within dominant heterocentric discourse: it is perceived as culturally improper for a biological male to *be* desired, to put it in other words, to be feminised. It is doubly threatening to straight cultures that the economy of homosexual desire allows for a doubling of pathways of desire, as the desired male can also be symbolically (actively) desiring, a paradox that confounds masculine/feminine binaries.

medicine, psychology, philosophy, and the arts. In effect, phallic texts cut out the clitoris in order to inscribe the phallus as the origin of signification and desire. This negates the possibility of sexual difference in the production of cultural texts and reiterates a pervasive masculine imaginary. Scholes (1982:134) states that: "In western Europe, from the Enlightenment on, this process [of clitoridectomy] has been primarily a semiotic one, not enacted on the suffering bodies of actual women, but inscribed in printed texts". Thus, the phallic imperative is fixed in the printed word and is shored up by canonical structures that traditionally admit and reify masculinist works. The masculinist tradition of artistic production perpetuates ontological violence towards the female body by *immasculating* female characters, readers and viewers. The female viewer is coerced into identifying themselves *in relation* to a primary male figure. In canonical dramatic texts, this immascultation of the female subject is instated in the formulaic method of centring action ('doing') and agency around a male protagonist. The needs and desires of the male figure are of primary importance whilst female characters generally take on a maternal or anti-maternal role (mother/castrating female). Female desire and agency thus sublimated, the viewer or reader is set up to be male-identified, that is, to address the masculine term as the marker of desire and agency. Women are thus fixed into a dichotomy whereby they come to signify either virgin/whore or mother/monster and there is little space for representational nuances in the interstices of these terms. The reproduction of femininity under the phallic mark in canonical dramatic works fixes women in a homosexual circuit of exchange wherein "...women and words are analogous media of exchange in the grammar of social life" (Brook-Rose 1986:312). Thus, the female body is fetishised and passed around, as it were, in a visual and linguistic economy that erases the trace of the desiring, speaking female body and negates difference. In order to resist masculine identification, one has to read actively against normative readings that privilege the masculine voice. To read for the maternal in canonical works ruptures the condition of closure that initially admits a work into a canon and opens it up to multiple *textual* readings. By reading against the grain for difference, the material and symbolic conditions that enabled the production of that text can be taken into account.

Poststructuralist feminists consider the production of phallogocentric canonical texts to have taken place at the expense of women. The pressing question is really why the phallogocentric text must perform such violent amputations and silencing. The short answer, as it were, is that female sexual difference

threatens to render the phallic authority of the symbolic impotent, ineffectual and unable to perform. The impotence of phallogocentric language, structured around binary divisions, to seize upon its object and fix meaning is exposed when its rules and borders are viewed as contingent and discursively produced. Thus, closure in conventional dramatic works is dependent upon the restoration of symbolic law and authority (where difference and difference can be negated) and the female subject remains castrated and silent. There are of course examples of texts in which the authorial voice is purposefully decentred and linguistic rules undermined, evident in the modernist canon of writers such as Beckett and Artaud who use language as an impotent medium that can never deliver the real. However, I reiterate that I am focussing on the female body specifically as a locus of signification in performance art and so I am interested in tracing the specific effects for women of decentring the (masculine) authorial voice and symbolic phallus.

As Austin (1990: 50) states, "...some of the old patterns must be changed to allow for woman-as-subject, not traded object, to be seen on stage". I now turn to a discussion of performance art as a form that, particularly in feminist manifestations, attempts to explicate sexual difference and address the problematic, familiar patterns of femininity reproduced in canonical dramatic and art works. I will look at the development of performance art briefly as an (anti)genre and note how female performers, amongst other marginalised identity groups, have co-opted the form as a political tool and a space for semiotic deconstruction.

### **3.4 Performance art**

Performance art is difficult to define, partly because the manifest intention behind it is to avoid definitions and categorisation. It has a two-fold influence, from theatre and the visual arts. This lack of singular origin already positions performance art in the interstices of canonical structures and explains why it is a form that has been produced and appropriated by marginalised groups, including women, as an effective political tool. Performance art has an experimental genealogy leading most recognisably from the initial abstractions in the visual arts of the early 1900s but also drawing upon western interpretations of 'primitive' ritual and the forms of carnival, street performance and burlesque. In the 1900s. in European visual arts circles, the cubists and then the futurists rejected the realist image and rendered the surface of the canvas fractured and multiperspectival. Dada and

surrealism interrogated the absolute categories of life and art and attacked classical harmonies by juxtaposing 'irrational' objects, producing nonsensical texts and including found objects and live performance or actions as art. Abstract expressionists exploited the effects of gestural and action painting whilst land artists in the latter half of the twentieth century left the gallery and studio space altogether in order to reconsider the relationship of the body, art object and landscape. The rise of realism in theatre and a subsequent backlash against the theatre-as-mirror in the forms of expressionist and absurdist experimentation resulted in the distinctions between the plastic arts and live theatre being softened. Hence conceptual art entered the discourse of art history. 'Conceptual art' did not 'arrive' as a term but was coined within the framework of massive geographical and historical shifts. In a sense, conceptual art would be unimaginable without the upheavals of modern technology and industry and resultant conquest, wars and diasporas that have marked the crisis in, if not the end to, mimetic representation. Amidst these upheavals, the body as a moving image has become a site for questioning and reorganising visibility. Butt (2005:8) describes the 1950s and 1960s as "[decades] responsible for ushering in what I want to call a 'theatrical turn' in post-war art production, one which drew the object-based practices of modernist painting and sculpture into the spatio-temporal co-ordinates of the event". It is the 'spatio-temporal co-ordinates of the event' that were problematised in performance art that attempted to lend a temporality to the theatrical event/aesthetic object. The 'Happenings' of the 1970s especially set a precedent for performance art as distinct from art or theatre. Sandford (1995) explains that Happenings differed from traditional theatre in its abandonment of the time-place-character matrices of the play. Traditional theatre makes use of what Sandford (1995:5) refers to as an "information structure", that is, an audience relies upon the cumulation of information to follow the play. The structure of the Happening is often indeterminate and actions compartmentalised. Discrete theatrical units are arranged sequentially or simultaneously. During the 1960s, performance artists deliberately distanced themselves from the conceits of traditional theatre and 'bourgeois' visual arts in the name of the conceptual, which in effect meant removing the art-object from a position of transcendent, timeless value and instating the transient-corporeal performance as art-event. Notably, the viewing public are no longer positioned to make aesthetic judgements but become complicit in the re-interpretation of the live event: "[the audience] are kinetic collaborators in the construction of ideas" (Goldberg 1998:10).

During the 1970s in the United States, Happenings and Body Art witnessed artists experimenting with their bodies in public and gallery spaces: the conceptual framing of any action by the artists could constitute an act as 'performance', such as when Chris Burden had a friend shoot him in the arm (*Shoot*, Los Angeles: 1971). Actions such as Burden's set a precedent in performance art for the exposure of an explicit bodily reality, removed from the pseudo-gore of Hollywood movies or the illusion and symbolism of theatre (although I might add that the injurious escapades of male performance artists also set a precedent of macho-antics in *avant garde* circles). Contemporaneous with developments in the United States, performance artists in Europe were focussed upon developing a theatre of images, rather than explicit body performance. Groups that used mixed media entertainment along with comedy and vaudeville acts emerged, such as the feminist collectives, Beryl and the Perils and Cunning Stunts. Performance art, Body Art, *Aktions* and Happenings (all related and hardly distinguishable terms) shared a concern for disrupting expectations imposed upon theatrical productions and art-objects, whether by experimenting with 'formal' media such as light, space, sound, time and image or turning to consider a visceral corporeality, or combining these elements.

#### 3.4.i Feminist performance art

'Performance art' as a term was first used in the 1970s, and it was during this time that feminist performance artists were particularly active. Herbert (1994:27) states that: "performance art is a medium unsullied by centuries of male control". There was ultimately no framework anticipated for reading feminist performance art, which is precisely what feminist analysts have seized upon in the reinscription of the performance-event in which the scene of writing is used to "remark again the performative possibilities of writing itself (Butt 2005:10). Like performance art, feminist performance art is a broad category, but shifted from a formal relation to art world languages in order to stage cultural *interventions*. The formative decade of feminist performance is marked by a radical turn, one of the most notable examples being American Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* (1975) in which she read out male criticisms of her work's "personal clutter" and "persistence of feelings" from a scroll pulled from her vagina (Goldberg 1998:132). Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* is a watershed performance for feminist performance art because Schneemann uses her explicit, female body as a tool for deconstructing masculinist value judgements about her feminist art practice. Schneemann's solo work also

exemplifies the tendency of feminist performance artists to perform alone. These solo performances emphasise the activities of the body in space and time, sometimes by the 'framing' of everyday behaviour and sometimes by the display of virtuosic skills; the content is often autobiographical and tends to be performed in 'art venues' like galleries or in public spaces. In this thesis I have written about solo performance artists exclusively, partly because as I have said, these performers tend to be soloists and partly because the use of one specific female body in performance perhaps avoids some of the problems of a generic, collective 'women'.

After the initial eruption of radical, feminist performance art in the 1970s, the 1980s was a decade of prohibitive backlash against feminists and liberalism of any sort: the English Thatcherite government and American conservative backlash, particularly homophobic and anti-feminist in tone, resulted in the liberal arts suffering funding cuts and censorship (Kauffman 1998). In South Africa, apartheid was in its violent death throes and needless to say, 'performance art' was an anomaly. However, in the 1990s and up to the present, performance artists have co-opted new social spaces and technologies in order to interrogate identity and the power relations that determine and restrict the body. In performance practice, the body remains a central concern and, for feminists who use the body as a premise of performance, flesh is an unresolved and loaded medium.

It is difficult to provide one definition for feminist performance art. As a genre, it has modernist sensibilities in that it often privileges the sublime and a grotesque or abject aesthetic (which could be viewed as an anti-aesthetic) and, like the *avant-garde* movements of the 1920s (for example, dada and surrealism) it "[attacks] the institution of art for [its] insularity and [tries] to reconnect art and praxis" (Doane 2004:1232). That is, feminist performance art is an expressly political art and the body, specifically, is never viewed as a neutral sign. However, feminist performance art is not categorised easily within a modernist framework, for postmodern historicism pervades in much of the autobiographical content of feminist performance art: the body in the present becomes a signpost in a constant reworking of the past, of the historical conditions that produced the sign 'woman'. I argue that there is at least one necessary condition for feminist performance art, and that is the exposure of dialectical structures or doublespeak. In order to show up the structures of patriarchal culture that condition femininity, it is necessary to 'show the show' as it were so that signifier

('woman') and the referent (the 'real' woman) are at odds. Under these conditions, *differance* is shown in operation. The process of becoming a subject is shown to be contingent upon psychic, social and material conditions. The dialectical structure of 'showing the show' is formulated in other ways by theorists such as Irigaray (1991), who uses the term "critical mimesis" for the process of miming the mimes of patriarchy back upon itself which in effect undermines its hegemonic hold over women. Butler's (1994) use of the term 'queer' also assumes the dialectical structure whereby shifting expected markers of sex and gender identification (as exemplified in drag) shows up the arbitrariness of conventional gender distinctions to the point that these become ridiculous or ineffective. As a forerunner of contemporary feminist performance, Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* exemplifies the use of the dialectical structure by feminist performance artists: her 'interior scroll' literally showed up the (masculine) conditions for being considered an artist that negates the female sex on a material and symbolic level.

Schneider (1997) makes an important point about feminist performance art's incursions in modernist art-politics when she argues that the dialectical is fundamental to feminist performance artists' appropriations of primitivism. Early twenty-first century *avant garde* artists adopted notions of the primitive, and the uncivilised, as a means of investigating the 'other' side of the (western) psyche, supposedly untainted by social restrictions. This adoption of the 'primitive', it should be mentioned, resulted in part from the appropriation of cultural artefacts from Europe's colonies and the skewed interpretations of Aids anthropology of non-Aryan cultures. The move towards abstraction, on the one hand, and the graphic or explicit body on the other in the visual arts and expressionist dramatic forms in the early twentieth century that, as I have said, influenced performance art, resulted largely from the assimilation of 'the savage' as a trope for otherness (see, for instance, Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907) in Madeline and Martin 2006). However, this assimilation merely fixes the 'other' side of the civilised/savage binary and did not serve to loosen up the associations of women (and female bodies and sexuality) with excess, danger and moral duplicity. Sex and race have been imbricated with the modernist formulation of the 'primitive' and as Schneider (1997:5) explains, it is the critical re-performance of the primitivised subject herself that enables the dialectical image to function in feminist performance art:

...unlike the use of primitivism and shock in the modernist avant garde, in contemporary feminist work it is the primitivised, or sexualised herself who (re)performs her primitivisation. Thus feminist "savagery" is linked with, but distinct from, modernist bad-boy avant-gardes who sought to employ primitivity, to rediscover or cite savagery in their transgressive acts. It is possible to argue that a feminist explicit body artist cannot employ primitivism, as her body itself has been linked to the lure/threat of primitivity. She is already primitive, already transgressive. Given this, the primitivised herself deploys or re-plays her primitivisation back across her body in a kind of double take, an effort to expose the cultural foundations of shock, (emphasis in original).

Schneider contends that 'women', like 'natives' and animals, are always already other, or off-centre in power structures. Thus, following Schneider's logic, the display of explicit female bodies in performance art throws the construction of the primitive body into question. Like the black body, the female body within western discourse is insatiable and excessive. Thus, a female performer who performs/plays across the site of excess and lack, the site of her own body, renders the symbolic foundations that construct bodies quite literal: "...the thrall of insatiability and excess is exhibited in the space of the particular-across particular bodies engendered in social relation" (Schneider 1997:6). The site of contradiction, in other words the dialectical image shown up by the explicit female body in performance, thus forms a potent space for feminist analysis and cultural production, which I will assume in the analyses in the following three chapters.

#### 3.4.ii Theorising feminist performance art

In closing off this chapter and as a lead-in to the analysis of actual feminist performance artists' work in Section Two, I open a brief discussion of performance theory. Performance theory developed from a reappraisal of the edifice of the dramatic canon, a critical shift that is contingent with the development of performance art. In order to interpret the live event without relying upon an Aristotelian blueprint or the distancing effect of aesthetic judgement, whereby artists and cultural critic are disinvested from the aesthetic object, it is necessary to rethink the margins between theatre/life and produce a discourse that takes into account the context within which images, performance and identity are produced. Performance quite clearly differs from traditional theatre in its

orientation of pleasures and identifications of both performer and audience whereby pleasure and knowledge are perspectival and situated temporarily. Performance theory works with the assumption that nowhere can a singular self or identity be present or guaranteed by the speaking, performing subject but that the subject and culture develop in dialectical tension between being and becoming. The presence of the speaking subject, then, is no longer guaranteed by the structures of narrative cohesion that have characterised western theatre since classical civilisation and that, from a feminist perspective, have been centred around the suppression of sexual difference. Performance theory draws upon theatre terminology for describing "...the social dimensions of cultural production" (Roach 1995:46) whereby 'performance' can refer to numerous activities from everyday rituals to protest marches. The performance event is thus not measured or valued against a theatrical canon. The canon becomes one discursive structure that contributes to "...[producing] the effects that it names" (Solomon 1997:2). The body in performance theory is viewed as "...an event situated in time and continuously subject to the co-constitutive dialectic of the organic and the social" (Wilton 1999:59).

Performance theory is broad and is being produced by my rewriting of actual performances in the following three chapters, in which I draw upon the theoretical arguments and positions that have been covered in the first three chapters. These theories are used to support my contention that the feminist rearticulation of flesh in performance art serves to expose that which the dominant phallogentric imaginary withholds and to produce discourses of difference. By literally showing the abject female body that is withheld from the symbolic, these flesh artists manifestly and strategically rewrite flesh against the dominant symbolic via a performative process. The immanence of the body in performance brings with it the potential of being positioned and viewed not as a guarantee of the presence of a transcendent self, but as a site of multiple meanings, desire and instability.

## **Conclusion**

Feminist performance artists have seized upon the theatrical metaphor in order to deconstruct gender as a manifestation of visible markings and unmarkings, that is, as something that is artificial in its standardisations, yet highly contentious and fraught with power struggles. My argument is that feminist performance art that uses the body as the

locus of performance pushes that performance beyond canonical definitions in order to enact transgressions of the body politic.

Chapters One to Three have been used to construct a theoretical framework for analysing feminist performance art. In the following three chapters, I will describe and analyse the performances of four artists. Although I do not always refer back explicitly to the content of the first half of the thesis, the critical discourse covered in these shapes my analyses of the body in performance.

## Focus Two: Performance

## Chapter Four

### Flesh made word: the Incarnation of St Orlan

#### Introduction

We have established in Section One that the subject is in process. Orlan, a multimedia performance artist who lives and works in France, views the body as the site of subjectivity and thus treats her body as a form of radically alterable intelligence. The alteration of the body, for Orlan, is produced as performance in which she initially used costume, drapery and make up. She has now moved on to use surgery and digital technology to morph her appearance. What I want to draw out in this chapter is the idea that the cut in Orlan's flesh acts as a cut in the skin of language, so to speak, and thus destabilises the centrality of *logos* in constructing the subject, language and representation. I view Orlan's performing body as a feminist tool for refiguring the power structures that underpin phallographic constructions of the female body in particular.

Orlan's career as a performance artist has spanned over three decades during which time she has developed the practice of Carnal Art, a definition that she uses to distinguish her performance art practice from Body Art. Orlan uses the soft material of her flesh to sculpt her own body and persona in order to struggle against: "...the innate, the inexorable, the programmed, Nature, DNA (which is our direct rival as artists of representation), and God"(Orlan 1998:325). Orlan's work is explicitly anti-canonical. Indeed the artist inverts performatively the aesthetic rules and boundaries of established western dramatic and art-cans. This strategic intervention in dominant modes of representation is not purgative nor confessional for the artist but is *productive* in the sense that, by disrupting and remaking the boundaries of her specifically female body, Orlan is able to cut into the dominant, phallographic discourse that formerly fixed her as identity as 'woman'.

<sup>1</sup> The work of the Viennese *Aktionists* and contemporary performers. Franko B and Ron Athey, all of whom use blood as a primary motif in performance are examples of prominent Body Art performers. Orlan is not interested in the substance of blood so much as in the movement between the body's exterior and interior.

#### 4.1 Orlan gives birth to her loved self: Formative performances

In order to establish the objectives of Orlan's performance art project, I have selected several examples of performances from the formative years of her career. Orlan<sup>19</sup> was born in 1947. She attended *L'ecole de Beaux Arts* in Dijon and began performing public interventions from the mid-1960s. A photograph dated 1964: *Orlan accouche cVelle-m'aime* ("Orlan Gives Birth to Her Loved Self), in which the artist is pictured in an overhead shot with an androgynous dummy appearing to e/merge from/with her vagina, anticipates themes that are reiterated in later works. Themes of doubling or twinning, autogeneration, trans-sex and the origin of identity that appear in this photograph are reiterated in later works. In *Orlan accouche*, it is unclear whether the artist 'gives birth' to the adult dummy-torso or whether Orlan emerges from the dummy's body, which raises questions as to *who* the 'loved' Orlan is: human, dummy or composite? Who Orlan is remains ambiguous, that ambiguity enabling the artist to operate in the margins of dominant culture.

*Orlan accouche* is a watershed for subsequent work. Orlan has critiqued consistently the structures of the male-dominated western art canon that relegates women to the position of perpetual object, locking the female subject into a maternal or aesthetic role. Orlan plays the rules of the canon, and indeed phallographic structures, against themselves not in order to transcend her feminine object-status, but to permeate the boundaries between object, subject and abject. The assumption of a self-given name and the choice to discard her paternal name indicates a deliberate disavowal of patrilineal descent and a protestation against circulation within homosexual circuits of exchange, whether these circuits be familial or operating within the economic structures of the 'art world'.

Naming is performative in the sense that a given name and paternal surname positions one within a patrilinear cultural matrix. Thus, inventing a single, self-given name with obscure origins reiterates Orlan's objective of displacing the centrality of the paternal law and the ubiquitous phallus from cultural production. Orlan continued to play with the notion of self-creation and reincarnation through naming when, in 1971, she named

<sup>19</sup> Orlan's given name is Mireille Suzanne Francette Porte

herself St Orlan. In *Orlan accouche*, the artist dis-identifies symbolically with the *imago* of both mother and father by insisting that she gives birth to herself, a hybrid creation whose organic and artificial components cannot be readily identified or separated.

*Orlan accouche* is a crucial work in the analysis of Orlan's work in terms of her adoption of performance as a mode of representation. Her formal background as a visual artist was in drawing and painting, but she also practised yoga and dance. Undoubtedly, her involvement in such body-centred practices, coupled with the dissemination of Body Art in Europe in the 1960s, influenced her performative approach to art-making. However, Orlan has distanced herself from modernist Body Art which frequently uses pain as a method for transcending bodily limits. Orlan has no interest in pain or the performance thereof, instead she interrogates art history and the gross, canonical mis-representation of women, particularly as fixed and othered identities. She asserts this critique by using her live body as her medium and her subject but, importantly, producing images is not bound to any autobiographical *confession* or revelation in the sense of religious or psychoanalytic catharsis but is invested in the production and invention of a hybrid subject. The body, then, cannot be read within a normative framework. So, in *Orlan accouche*, for instance, the convention of the female nude is displaced by the uncanny image of doubled or indistinct bodies. The image of a double-headed monster alludes perhaps to the process of giving birth that is entirely lacking in canonical representations (relegated as such bodily processes are to the realm of abjection and the private). However, Orlan is not interested in reifying women's capacity to give birth, but in assuming the capacity for representation, that is, assuming the agency of a creative process that has been reserved for the men of the academy whose artistic mastery displaces the creative capacity of the maternal. That Orlan's giving birth to herself is obviously staged celebrates artifice as a means of transforming the body and representation. The documentary evidence of the photograph in *Orlan accouche* is of a staged event that really raises the kinds of questions we find in Butler (1993) about performativity, that is, that identity and presence do not pre-exist the social but are manufactured by appeal to and interpretation of the material or 'evidence'. Orlan's use of performance in the production of the image of 'giving birth' in *Orlan accouche* parodies not the process of birth but the misconstrual of generative function and originating will with the masculine subject. However, Orlan has specifically constructed an image of a doubled, hybrid body which is the antithesis of the rational, closed subject

privileged by masculinist discourse. Thus, we are led to question whether the 'self' of Orlan is not indeed the artist and the image, the creator and the created.

4.1.ii A society of mothers and whores: *The Kiss of the Artist*

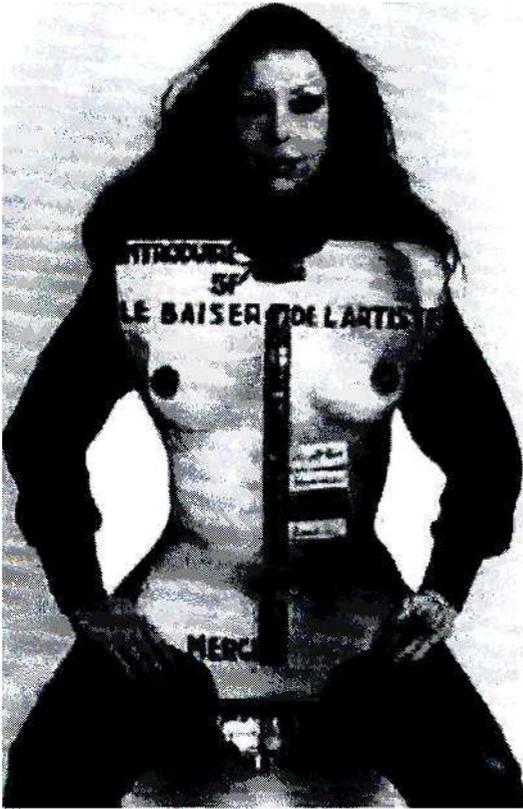


Fig. 3 *Le Baiser de l'artiste* (1977) ([www.google.co.za](http://www.google.co.za))

In *Le Baiser de l'artiste* (*The kiss/fuck of the artist*, 1977), Orlan moved her performative photographic portraits out of the studio to intervene directly in the public domain in live performance. *Le Baiser*, an installation that was set up at the entrance of the Grand Palais in France, where the International Contemporary Art Fair was taking place, consisted of two life-sized photographs made into cut-outs of Orlan. In one she is bedecked in white drapery as the Virgin Mary with breasts exposed, the other is of her life-sized nude torso. In the performance, Orlan sat behind the photograph of her naked torso, which doubled as an automatic kiss-vending machine, and yelled out: "*cinq francs! cinq francs!*" to passers-by. When five francs were inserted into the slot between her pictorial breasts, the money fell down to a small box at the crotch. In response, "Orlan jumped off her pedestal and gave the slot player a kiss on the lips whilst several bars of Bach's *Tocatta in B minor*

played on a tape recorder. A screeching siren sounded at the end of the kiss" (O' Bryan 2005:3). *A passerby could also offer candles to the Virgin for the same price.*

In *Le Baiser*, apart from the scandal that the performance/installation provoked, Orlan used her body in order to historicise the production of both the artwork, the artist and the female body as arbitrary commodities in modern capitalist economies. In *Le Baiser*, the dichotomy of virgin/whore, and the availability of the iconographic image as an exchange-commodity, is set up as a literal juxtaposition. Orlan writes about *Le Baiser*: "Facing a Society of Mothers and Merchants, at the foot of the cross, two women: Mary and Mary Magdalene...Mother or prostitute, private woman...or public woman, duty and pleasure, respect and disdain" (in O'Bryan 2005:4). Orlan's playful doubling of the image of Virgin and Whore, using her own body, in *Le Baiser* serves to interrupt the audience's identification with a seamless character or image and highlights Orlan's refusal to identify with the one or the other. Representing only one image or construct negates the other whereas juxtaposing the iconographic virgin/whore exposes the dialectical tensions inherent in their construction. Denaturalising the iconography of the virgin/whore dichotomy does not resolve feminist dilemmas by offering a set of alternative modes of representation for women but rather critiques and deconstructs dominant visual economies. Orlan acknowledges that in a "society of Mothers and Merchants" women's bodies are interchangeable, to be circulated for exchange value. By positioning her live body behind the slot-machine, Orlan literalises the sexualisation of women's labour (including the labour of female artists)." Orlan also literalises the position of the female body in canonical art by representing herself as a spectacle to-be-consumed. Ince (2000:138) explains that, in *Le Baiser*:

[t]he commodity in Orlan's performance was her own body, a woman's body, and by deploying it in this way Orlan pointed up how the exchange of commodities in the art market functions in exactly the same way as the economics of prostitution, in which the woman's body is most often the commodity being paid for.

" What I mean here is that women's labour is typically linked to their sex and thus undermined; thus childbirth and rearing, industrial work, teaching, 'craft' and so on are culturally encoded as the result of biological predispositions.

The spectacle of Orlan selling the fetishised kiss, through a playful and parodic performance, in turn makes a spectacle of the regulation of female bodies by religion, art and monetary exchange.

The performance art collective Fluxus, that was influential through the 1960s and 1970s, were critical of the commodification of artistic personae rampant in the artworld at that time (witnessed for example in the sycophantic following of artists such as Andy Warhol). Fluxus were also avidly anti-capitalist and anti-bourgeois. However, although Orlan had been influenced by the Fluxus artists in their criticism of capitalism and their appropriation of public spaces for performance, her politics were overtly feminist whereas Fluxus, and the artistic avant garde generally, were dominated by an overriding macho-clique (perhaps this accounts for the relative obscurity of female Fluxus practitioners such as Yoko Ono). By selling her kisses that emanated from her specifically female/artist's body, Orlan was pinpointing the institution of prostitution in the capitalist exchange of goods that is based upon a "gendered, patriarchal and exploitative model" (Ince 2000:140). Within this model, "all exchanged goods are effectively 'prostituted', but women's bodies are at the bottom of the pile" (*ibid*). Read from the perspective of Judith Butler's (1993) theory on gender performativity, Orlan 'hijacks' the phallic imperative of art-production by becoming commodity and artist simultaneously. The image of the Virginal body, to which candles could be dedicated, is in effect a commodified icon that sells the idea of redemption and is thus not entirely different from the whore. For female artists to redeem themselves to the academy, they have to essentially sell themselves because, as Orlan makes quite clear (in Cros et al 2004), women remain an exception to the phallic rule that governs cultural canons. Thus, Orlan's reiteration of the female artist- as-prostitute and Virgin in *Le Baiser* poses some cutting questions about the modes of business exchange that are available to female artists. In homosexual (or homosocial) circuits of exchange, then, alternately selling or ingratiating oneself as whore or virgin respectively is normalised. When these mechanisms are exposed as operations of gender performativity, as in *Le Baiser*, then I think that a critical mimesis can be seen to be in operation and the conditions of masculine supremacy exposed.

That Orlan has positioned herself as a commodity in *Le Baiser* might trouble some feminist critics: that she mimics quite literally the production of gendered power structures and modes of exchange, as in *Le Baiser*, is an aspect of her work that has distanced her

from some feminists. I will take such criticisms into account as I elaborate upon her work, but I do so with the view that feminism's inability to pin down Orlan's performances as 'true' to feminist political institutions has more to do with the limits of feminist (or any) discourse and less to do with Orlan's use of the dialectical image.

#### 4.1.ii Measuring up: *MesuRAGES*

*MesuRAGES* (*Measurements*: 1972-83, see fig 13) is an important set of performances in the development of Orlan's work. In the *MesuRAGES* performances, Orlan wore a white tunic made from the fabric of her trousseau" and high heeled boots. She would lie down on the ground and mark her position above her head with chalk, and then repeat the action. In this way, she used her body to measure various institutional spaces, such as the *Centre Georges Pompidou* in Paris, by seeing how many of her body-lengths fitted into the space." When her measurements were completed, she would knock on doors requesting soap and water to wash her dirty garments in public. After washing them, she would empty the residue into glass bottles that were sealed as relics. Amongst the structures that Orlan measured in this set of public interventions are Saint Peter's Square, Rome (1974), Musee Saint Pierre, Lyon (1979), Saint Lambert Square, Liege, Belgium (1980), and the Guggenheim Museum, New York (1983).

The *MesuRAGES*, as performances, were "slow in tempo and long in duration" (Augsburg 1998:298). Orlan was literally taking stock of the architecture, both material and ideological, of patriarchal institutions that have become edifices of cultural value over time and have thus been naturalised as components in the visual and psychic landscape of place. The pertinence of her critique lies in the fact that she used her body to see how these institutions "measure up"." The use of her body repoliticised the meanings of the places that she re-measured as Orlan took issue with the axiom of Protagoras, adopted by the modern architect Le Corbusier, that: "man is the measure of all things" (Cros *et al*

<sup>1</sup> Orlan writes: *A violent and symbolic confrontation led to Orlan's snatching of the trousseau lovingly amassed by her mother; on those sacred sheets bestowed to symbolise the "giving away" of the daughter to another patriarchal nexus. Orlan exultantly, euphorically, received her lovers, tracing their sperm trails with pen then with savage, enraged embroider}-, again a d'etouement of the womanly skills she had been taught "toplease".* (Orlan 1998:316).

" The official *Orlan-corp*s measurement of the Centre Georges Pompidou, measured in 1977, is 69x24 and was commemorated in a brass floor plaque (cited in O'Bryan 2005:5).

" Units of measurement such as the foot or the cubit (the forearm) are derived from male corporeal measurements; Orlan "...interrupts this language of measure" (Ince 2000:35).

2004:32). Ince (2000:35) describes Orlan's acts of measuring as 'gynometry' as opposed to anthropometry that assumes a universal male body as the standard unit of measurement and proportion in built structures. I agree with Ince that gynometry may substitute "...femaleness for maleness which highlights the gendered nature of a subject of (practical) science too long assumed to be 'neutral', or free of the fundamental modifiers of gender and race" (*ibid*). However, Orlan does not operate with the methodology of mere substitution, for as she measures up the architecture of masculinist institutions, she acknowledges that subjectivity has been regulated and constructed by such institutions in the hexis between bodies and social spaces (*cf* Chapter Two). Thus, Orlan chips away at the edifice of femininity inasmuch as she deconstructs patriarchal institutions.

The treatment of space is significant in reading the *MesuRAGES* series, not only in terms of the production of quantitative measurements. Orlan's interventions in public spaces with her female body transgress directly the divide between public and private as she penetrates public, traditionally masculine spaces. As the measurements progressed, the chalk marks left by the artist remained as traces of her performance, traces of a female body upon the text of architecture. Orlan also undermined the notion of the female corpus as a container for, as she moved methodically through space, her body was the standard for measuring space and not the typical spatialised object to-be-measured. The repetitive act of measuring mimics the processes whereby masculine corporeality comes to stand in for the norm and thus configures civic space. Orlan transgresses the civic space by taking on the role of a 'public woman' (here again playing with the maligned figure of the prostitute). Orlan's transgression of the boundaries between private and public body intervenes in the body politic. Indeed, her interventions are scandalous. Orlan's measurements provoked "...violently sexual reactions: she was spat upon, insulted as 'a woman of the streets'; the trial of measurement passes through filth" (Ince 2000:40). Scandal is provoked by the female body that takes the place of an abstract universal measurement. The particularity of the Orlan-body as a unit of measurement points out the arbitrary nature of universals and simultaneously highlights the systematic negation of female morphology from representational structures.

The way that Orlan costumed her body during the *MesuRAGES* performances is significant in terms of her treatment of the body as an envelope figured by time- space relations. She states: "I didn't want the measurements to be made with a naked body, but

with a socialised body, which means a body that is dressed (even over-dressed) in a smock that... [also] plays the role of a screen" (Orlan in Cros *et al* 2004:49).

Orlan began the performance in a virginal-white trousseau outfit, which was then clearly marked and stained by her labour. By bottling the water after washing the outfit, Orlan preserved the abject material, the dirt and sweat, that is pushed aside in the production of the smooth and completed image and that must bear no corporeal trace of the producer:

The 'maculae', stains, sweat and dust-infused water [...] were collected in a bowl and then transferred to containers sealed with wax as relics. The Virgin, conceived 'immaculately', without stain, counters the tradition of the bride's display of dirty linen after the wedding night...(Ince 2000:40).

I have referred previously to abject materiality in terms of the feminist trope of the maternal. However, Orlan's material/maternal is not a concept that aligns her with more traditional feminist thinking. For instance, the high heeled boots that Orlan wore for the *MesuRAGES* estranges her from radical feminist prescriptions for the reclamation of a 'natural' female body and which supports a concept of the maternal that is inextricably linked to notions of idealised motherhood, nurturance and the body as a container for an authentic 'inner' feminine self. Such restrictive footwear is, within the radical feminist camp, indicative of an investment in the patriarchal edifice and masculine fetishes. In the same school of feminist thought it may be asked just why a self-proclaimed feminist artist would decide to expend energy on measuring patriarchal institutions. Orlan, however, deconstructs patriarchal institutions from within, that is, she practises a form of critical mimesis. It is increasingly apparent in Orlan's work, particularly in her series of performance-surgeries (discussed later), that the body produced by religious, scientific and artistic dogma must be changed from the inside out. Orlan does not direct resistance against endemic cultural misogyny into the production of a separatist politics in which the dualisms of dominant signifying systems are reassembled in a different guise. Orlan uses subversive humour, excess and spectacle in order to mock the pretensions of phallographic institutions, but she also *produces* a critical feminist discourse by performing against the rubric of traditional art and theatre forms.

In the *MesuRAGES* series, Orlan began to use public spectacle as a political performance tool. The spectacle created by miming back the logic of the institutions that she wants to interrogate, but of which she, as an artist, is a part, spectacularises the performer and the institutions that she measures. Irigaray's idea of the speculum is apt here, for the critical reflexivity of Orlan's spectacle serves to *specularise* the subject *and* the institutions that produce her as such. The space of the spectacle, then, is forced into visibility or exception. The female body is always already an exception to the masculine universal, but Orlan's strategy is to disrupt the ubiquity of the phallogentric norm by drawing its structures into visibility.

The slow and laborious act of measuring that is reminiscent of religious pilgrimage is at one level narcissistic. The desire to see how / fits, as it were, is an assertion of sovereign individuality. At the same time, the notion of sovereign individuality is subverted by Orlan's use of her socially marked, female body to make the measurements. It has been established, specifically in Chapter One, that / for the female subject is always negatively split and fractured, at least insofar as she is assimilated into the logos of phallogentrism. Orlan has appropriated the notion of the psychoanalytic split subject in her work as a positive possibility, for she uses the ambiguous position of / in order to destabilise the very centrality of a preordained self to the notion of identity.<sup>24</sup> Orlan in effect acts out the duplicity of the split-feminine subject, or the one who is not *one* by using her body as a unit of socio-political measurement. That is, she grapples with the complexities and contradictions of female subjectivity from within the patriarchal nexus by refusing identification with either side of a feminist/patriarchal polemic. She states (in the installation of *1001 Reasons Not to Sleep*, 1979, documented by O'Bryan 2005:7)

My will is to battle with myth  
 To measure myself against it  
 To mystify it in turn  
 To appropriate its legend.

<sup>24</sup> The narcissistic impulse has emerged as a trope in the work of other feminist performance artists such as Gina Pane (O'Dell 1998) and Carolee Schneemann (Schneider 1997) and has been targeted by canonical criticism for a lack of proper aesthetic distance between art object and subject.

To measure herself against 'myth', the myths that pervade the collective unconscious and its material forms such as the buildings measured in *MesuRAGES*, is narcissistic. However, it is critical to Orlan's feminism that she reflect herself in the structures of the dominant phallographic system if indeed she is going to decentre the monological authority of the phallic imperative.

#### 4.1.iii Creative genius and taboo: *A poil/sans poil*

Orlan targeted the myth of exclusive masculine genius particularly in the performance of *a poil/sans poil (Naked/Without Hair)*, performed at the Louvre in 1978. Orlan stood in front of the dramatic *Venus and the Three Graces Surprised by a Mortal*, by the Old Master painter Blanchard, with a paint brush between her teeth. She then opened a coat slowly and revealed a black dress upon which a picture of her naked body was superimposed. She then ripped open a triangle over her genital area to expose her shorn and reglued pubic hair. She plucked the glued hair off and repainted her shaved pubis black. This is an amusing reference to the background painting in which the women are all naked whilst their genitalia remain in deep shadow. Orlan then covered her crotch with a white palette and inserted the paintbrush into the finger-hole of the palette. She turned her back to the audience, the paintbrush forming a visual pun as a stand-in for an erect penis.

*A poil/sans poil* pokes fun at the idea of exclusive masculine creativity and the notion, indeed the myth, reinforced by artists such as the modernist Yves Klein that the paintbrush and the pen are instruments of phallic authority, scoring the mark of creativity in/on the virginal space of the page/canvas/female body. The shaved and reglued hair of Orlan's pubis, exposed beneath the *image* of her naked body that is worn over her living flesh, forms a wry commentary on the production of images in the privileged visual economy that disavows the textured, grotesque body<sup>3</sup> in favour of the closed, smooth surface of classical representation (a mode of representation and aesthetic sensibility exemplified by Blanchard's painting behind Orlan). The overlay of painted pubis and erect brush/phallus forms a semiotic deconstruction of the mechanisms of sexual difference instituted in the cultural sphere. Orlan subverts this construct by re-marking her lack of

<sup>3</sup> Bakhtin describes the grotesque body as "...a body in the act of becoming...the grotesque image ignores the closed, smooth and impenetrable surface of the body and retains only its excrescences (spouts and buds) and orifices..." (Bakhtin 1965:318).

phallus whilst simultaneously possessing the paintbrush/phallus as a prosthetic prop. Here Orlan works with the idea of *and*: she is both female (by definition a castrated male) *and* male in the sense of possessing a (symbolic) phallus. She is covered and naked, image and body. Her duplicity does not bind to an easy feminist reading, for some might ask just why she would want to represent herself as lacking/having a phallus when repressive phallic authority is the 'problem' to begin with. Counter to this view, the replication of the phallus as a prosthesis can be seen as a particularly sophisticated performative move (not unlike Butler's thinking on the lesbian phallus, 1993). *If* the symbolic phallus in Lacan has no fixed referent (that is, the penis), then it is really a matter of convention that the masculine subject and his creative projects are privileged. However, it is apparent that the tools of phallogocentric signifying practice, wielded most often by biological men, have veiled the female body, and particularly the female sex, in deep shadow. Shadows and darkness are associated with fear and curiosity (what will light reveal?). The question that Orlan provokes for me is whether the shadows that obscure female genitalia in classical female nudes are not in fact a mechanism whereby the fear of the phallic woman (the castrating female) is allayed. In *A poil/sans poil*, the contradiction of having *and* not having a phallus ruptures the coherent dualism of sexual difference and undermines the myth that the phallus is the fixed signifier privileged in biological men. The doubling of signifiers in her use of *and* instead of the negative *not* (phallic *and* castrated, artist *and* art object and so on) is played upon repeatedly in Orlan's work, as can be seen in the aforementioned examples. Thus, she represents herself as literally duplicitous which, because her image does not refer back to a single, omnipotent origin [father, god or phallus] is in effect blasphemous.

#### 4.1 .iv Monstrous body: *The Head of the Medusa*

In *Documentary Study: the Head of the Medusa* (1978), Orlan draws upon the myth of feminine duplicity that is represented in the archetype of the Medusa. This multimedia performance took place at the Musee S. Ludwig in Aix-la-Chapelle. Orlan describes the performance (in O'Bryan 2005:112):

This involved showing my sex (of which half my pubic hair was painted blue) through a large magnifying glass— and this during my period. Video monitors showed the heads of those arriving, those viewing, and those leaving. Freud's text

on "Head of Medusa" was handed out at the exit, stating: "At the sight of the vulva even the devil runs away".

In Freudian psychoanalysis, the head of the Medusa stands in as a representation of female genitals. In the classical myth, anybody who looks at the snake-haired gorgon will be turned to stone. The hero Perseus must slay the Medusa by looking at her reflection in a polished shield and, watching her indirectly, he is able to decapitate the monster. The inversion of the proper body that takes place when the head stands in for the genitals, as in the case of the Medusa, produces the prototypical grotesque body described by Bakhtin (1965). The Medusa, with her writhing hair, is monstrous precisely because her body is multiplicitous: hers is the condition of female corporeality mythologised in a negative interpretation of the female sex. In Orlan's *Documentary Study*, the audience looks upon the magnified image of the vulva, bleeding red and painted half-blue.<sup>26</sup> The apparition of the explicit, menstruating female sex is entirely taboo—there is no aesthetic framework within dominant discourse for recuperating the image of the female sex, not to mention menstruation (see Houppert 1999), except in terms of a negative repression. The application of paint to the genitals further denaturalises the 'sight' as the possibility of reading the genitals within a medical framework is undermined. The direct visual encounter with the female sex is taboo outside of a heterocentric Oedipalised scenario because the female sex/subject ceases to function as a mirror for masculine desire. The mirror, states Clarke (2000:191) "...removes the power of the real body". The use of video cameras to film the audience's reactions to the magnified vulva is a mirroring device that displaces horror and fascination from the real, flesh and blood female body onto the viewer. The frame of the video monitor, focussed on the audience's heads, effectively decapitates the viewer in an act of inverted castration: the violence of such an image points to the normalised violence of the Oedipal narrative instituted in the female body. When the body in process is encountered in performance art, a viewer's position in terms of aesthetic distance (represented in the Medusa myth as a mirroring shield) is undermined and indeed removed. Moreover, in *Documentary Study*, the conventional means of identifying a body through facial recognition is displaced by the inversion of the facial view to the display of bodily cavities and fluids. The performer's body in this instance no longer offers the presence of the auratic object: as the open, grotesque body negates presence and identity.

<sup>26</sup> Orlan chooses to work with red and blue as these colours appear regularly in the drapery of paintings of Baroque madonnas.

The display of the indiscrete body in *Documentary Study* is also intelligible in terms of Bakhtin's thinking on the grotesque. Bakhtin (1965:317-18) describes the topos of the grotesque body in terms of "[m]ountains and abysses, such is the relief of the grotesque body, or...towers and subterranean passages". Further to this, "Grotesque imagery constructs a "double body" [that is]...in the endless chain of bodily life it retains the parts in which one link joins the other, in which the life of one body is born from the death of the preceding, older one" (*ibid*). I am interested in the relation of the grotesque body to time, for the grotesque body, as in *Documentary Study*, doubles time in the sense that it is a body in process, not bound by ideological developments. The grotesque body necessarily signifies a body becoming from the death of the old. Thus, the body is never the self-same and does not reach a point of conclusion or identity. The grotesque body thus resists logos, it is a body without singular identity. What Orlan has seized upon, I think, is the radical potential of the body-becoming to revolutionise the passive feminine subject. The passive feminine subject is in a sense reorganised by Orlan's use of a dual grotesque aesthetic and the order of individualistic decision. Perhaps we can view Orlan's project as the production of a feminist subject— a subject that is radically alterable because, like the female sex, she is always doubled and thus not bound by the diktat of linear time. *Documentary Study* can thus also be viewed as a rejection of psychoanalysis as "a generalising interpretive machine" (O'Bryan 2005:91), as the Orlan-body is positioned explicitly as a body that generates signification.

The Medusa head of the female sex also stands in for the archetypal death's head and all-consuming orality. Bakhtin (1965:337) describes the gaping cavity of the mouth, with the headless oesophagus as quintessentially grotesque: "In bodily topography hell is represented as Lucifer's gaping jaws and...death swallows up and returns the body to the bosom of the earth. [W]e are still within the sphere of familiar images: the open mouth and the womb". The image of the all-consuming mouth is to be found again in the myth of the *vagina dentata*. Here again we find the image of the castrating female threatening the unique privilege of the phallus. Symbolic castration is thus the threat of difference. By exposing her bodily interior and exterior simultaneously in *Documentary Study* and later in her surgical works, Orlan disrupts the exclusive dichotomy between skin and flesh that is also the borderline between identity and non-identity, sameness and difference. Such sustained dualisms are proper to the Baroque organisation of the world around

unsynthesised dualisms that double meaning. Orlan's use of the Baroque aesthetic becomes more explicit in her *tableaux vivants* (to be discussed), and the surface-interior of the vulva forms a fold or doubling that is revisited in subsequent works, particularly in her facial surgeries. Clarke (2001:191) states that "...surgery on [Orlan's] face-wound is the revisited Medusa's head, the uterus, the interior female body, the place of life or death".

In the manner of the saint and of Artaud's "body without organs" (Artaud 1970), St Orlan's reincarnation entails a constant casting-off of the flesh in order to re-generate meanings, surfaces and language. Instead, Orlan positions her own body-machine as generative: she redraws her own psychic and morphological borderlines which, as the exposure of the private body in *Documentary Study* exemplifies, is a politically invested, transgressive act.

#### **4.2 The iconography of St Orlan**

Between 1970-1980, Orlan developed a complex iconography of the persona of St Orlan. In contrast to works such as *Le Baiser* and *Documentary Study* that used flesh as an explicit medium, the *tableaux vivants* that she produced whilst interrogating the image of the saint centred on the power of Christian iconography and the representation of the sacred and transcendental. The production of St Orlan's iconography, however, does not inherit any of the taboos and moral mores from Christian tradition: carnal art is intended to be blasphemous in its negation of a single, paternal authority and the propositional construction of the idolatrous image of Orlan. Whilst the elaborate costumes that the artist used to drape herself drew attention to the exoteric aspects of the saint's body, the idea of the skin and the body as a garment or dress (*robe*) was developed significantly during this period. The extrapolation of the notion of the body, and particularly the skin, as a temporary robe has led directly to the surgical project of "The Reincarnation of St Orlan", the artist's most ambitious and risky project to date. The shift in register from the profane and sexualised body of the whore represented in *Le Baiser* and *MesuRAGES* and the grotesque body that is displayed in *Documentary Study* to the transcendental imagery of the saint explored anew Orlan's rejection of the maternal (the whore and the saint are non-maternal figures). The rejection of the maternal is not the same as the negation of the maternal in the phallogocentric symbolic, but is a rejection of all that is repressive and stifling about the role of the maternal/woman.

The Baroque aesthetic dominates the production of 'sacred' images during the period in which Orlan worked extensively with the image of herself-as-saint. The Baroque: "provided a context for exploring how art uses imitation and artifice to solicit the senses, and provided a means for testing art's capacity to suggest what lies beneath the surface of things" (Cros *et al* 2004:85). From the perspective of performance analysis, Orlan's use of performance as a medium in the production of her sainthood's iconography indicates that her deconstruction of art history cannot be divorced from a deconstruction of the artifice of theatre and its scopic qualities. Theatre, like visual art, uses imitation and artifice to 'solicit the senses'(Cros *et al* 2004:85). The production of St Orlan's iconography is a dual exercise in constructing the image of the saint whilst simultaneously deconstructing the robes and veils that produce the saintly body as such. That is, artifice is used deliberately in order to expose the way in which artifice functions performatively to produce the image/identity. Performance is thus a means of constructing and deconstructing the varied personae of St Orlan. This two-streamed approach befits the construction of the Baroque aesthetic of the double or *fold*. The fold is a central motif in the iconography of St Orlan where the doubled surfaces or folds in drapery are significant to Orlan's incorporation of duality in her work.

During the development of the iconography of St Orlan, the artist performed several instalments in the series entitled *Drapery-The Baroque*. I cite the first performance in this series in order to outline the actions that she undertook for other performances. In 1979, at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, Orlan arrived at the centre in a shipping crate used for artworks. She then appeared in a plexiglass display chest of the type conventionally used for the exhibition of untouchable reliquaries. She was draped in trousseau sheets. The folds of her gown were held by nylon threads attached to the plexiglass box. Assistants could make the drapery roll and flow around the saint's "mystic body" (Cros *et al* 2004:62) by pulling on the nylon threads intermittently. The threads were cut and then the body of the saint was transferred to a wooden plank and carried ceremoniously like a coffin through the space. The procession was reverentially slow. Orlan then rose up and began spinning, unrolling the drapery around her face and the linen around her arms. She unravelled a rag-doll that had been incorporated into the folds of her garment. Orlan describes the unravelling of the bundle: "[I] unswaddled a bundle resembling a little child made of forty metre ribbon made of the same fabric. Inside was a painted bread sculpture with a blue crust and red crumb, which I ate in public often to the

point of vomiting" (Orlan in O'Bryan 2005:8). The unravelled fabric was then pulled taut to make a long train or rope and the saint's hair was unveiled. The saint then disrobed and, without her mysterious costume of drapery, was transformed (or revealed?) to be mortal and secular. The Orlan-body rolled and crawled on a red carpet in which she then wraps herself to become a red ball. The audience witness the demystification of this saint "who arrived in magnificent drapery reminiscent of Bernini's ecstatic [Baroque] statues [for example, the well known Ecstasy of St Theresa ] only to turn everything into rags" (Cros et al 2004:64). The mystery of the saintly body is thus shown to be the effect of conventionalised artifice.

Saint Orlan's 'hagiography' consists of the performative reiteration of dialectical images that are performed in the act of veiling and unveiling in the *Drapery...* series. Orlan continued to disrupt and parody her own iconography into the 1980s through the *Drapery...* performances and in installations of video and photography. She did not abandon live performance during this stage, but she did concentrate more intensively on multimedia installations in which the image of her saintly persona was staged for photographic and video portraits. In these portraits or *tableaux vivants*, the expressive gesture is concretised in the still, photographic medium: in her *tableaux vivants*, Orlan presented herself in various poses as a Virgin Madonna figure, draped in extensive *toile*, face painted white and one breast exposed. The rhapsodic expression on her face and her stylised hand gestures (gesticulating heavenwards and to the earth) functioned to mimic ecstatic religious imagery whilst referring back to the profane and the corporeal. In the exhibition *Skai et Sky and video* (1984, see figs 14, 15), Orlan climbed atop a pile of cinder blocks, clad first in white leatherette (a material that she chose for its malleability and its approximation of the appearance of marble when photographed). Her body was draped with elaborate, sculptural folds, one breast exposed. A video monitor relayed particular body parts, such as a hand, foot or breast. In other photographs from this series, Orlan appears in black leatherette, brandishing a white and a black cross and then toy guns. She always has one breast exposed: the breast alludes both to the nursing Virgin Madonna and the mythical one-breasted female warriors, the Amazons. The dialectical image can be seen to function here again in the representation of St Orlan as the sacred and profane meet in the image of the saint.

Orlan extended the scope of her hagiography after she had visited India in the late 1980s and there purchased enormous billboards usually used to advertise Bollywood films. On these billboards, she produced posters advertising films about the life of St Orlan- films that have never actually been produced. The credits for these fake films included names of supporters of her work and some actual film stars. The contradictions between truth and artifice manifested by Orlan's depictions of St Orlan, both in the *tableaux vivants* and the billboards, served to theatricalise the media that she used by creating spectacles in which cultural detritus such as plastic, polystyrene, fake marble and leatherette are juxtaposed with images of the sacred. This juxtaposition is typical of Orlan's use of the Baroque aesthetic. The duplicity of the baroque aesthetic as it is used by Orlan and the artist's preoccupation with the doubling of meaning undermine the fixity of the patriarchal word and contingent institutions of church, law and state. Orlan said of the period in which she developed the imagery of sainthood that: "I am shattering the shell, shattering the marble, breaking open the drapes, and really proposing a new image disconnected from the roots in which I gave birth to myself (in Ince 2000:16). This statement by the artist points to the process whereby her performance art practice actively engages with the "fold" via manifesting contradictory images. The fold, as in the folds of drapery that encase the saint, is an infinite becoming where surfaces are multiple and fold in upon themselves. Orlan's use of the fold as a visual and theoretical motif is certainly a feminist reclamation of the idea of difference that is represented in the fold's doubling of time and space (cf. Irigaray 1985b). Furthermore, I argue that performance is an effective mode of exploring this idea of the fold or multiplicity as, particularly in feminist performance art, the turn to the body as primary signifier indicates a reconstitution of the flesh in time and space. Orlan's project is not to re-produce the body via appeal to an 'authentic' female psychic morphology. Clearly authenticity is an anomaly to her. Rather, the body remade via the fold (in the subject, in the robe or in the skin) is a hybrid creation. Indeed, today Orlan may be described as posthuman or a cyborg, although she nominates herself as a saint."<sup>97</sup>

As I move into the discussion of her surgical interventions in the following section, it will be important to analyse her work as intervening in historical constructions of the

" The term 'Posthuman' refers to the rejection of liberal humanism's internally motivated subject. The cyborg body is integrated with the machine- not entirely robot and not entirely biological entity.

flesh (particularly the skin). This historical analysis is contemporaneous with the production of emergent, feminist knowledges of the body.

### **4.3 The body opened: The Reincarnation of St Orlan**

Orlan is the first and only performance artist to have used surgery as a performance medium. She distinguishes her practice of body modification from the practices of Body Artists, such as Ron Athey and Franko B who use blood/bleeding in performance, by referring to her art as 'carnal art' (*art charnel*). Whilst there are points of similarity between Orlan and the aforementioned artists' works, in terms of penetrating the skin-surface and imaging the wounded and bleeding (wet and fleshy) body, Orlan works most specifically with the idea of the body as a sack or dress whose folds are not closed. The plasticity of skin, rather than blood, is the focus of Orlan's carnal art practice and pain is not a redeeming quality to her. Drapery and dress are also clearly linked to Orlan's deconstruction of the 'skins' of archetypal female identities (such as the Virgin/Whore/Madonna/Medusa). Orlan states that carnal art is necessarily feminist (in Moos 1996) and so places her gendered body at the centre of her performance practice. Orlan (in Obrist 2004:190) states that:

...as a female artist, the main material and recording surface I had to hand was my body, which I had to reappropriate because I had been dispossessed of it, in a way, by dominant ideology. Because I was a woman, dominant ideology prevented me from living my personal life and my artistic life the way I wanted to live them. I thought working on the representation of my body—including its public representation—was much more interesting, much more problematic, and much more efficient politically... than hiding myself behind canvas and paint.

As I describe and discuss the operations of *The Reincarnation of St Orlan*, I will draw attention to the ways in which carnal art kicks against the construction of a lacking and excessive female body in dominant discourses of theatre, art and biomedicine. The opening and reclosing of the body in this instance modifies the body so that the Christian biblical principle of 'word made flesh' is reversed. That is, the flesh is made word.

*The Reincarnation of St Orlan* was initiated in May 1990 at the exhibition, *Art and Life in the 1990s* in Newcastle, England, where Orlan announced her intentions to use plastic surgery as an artistic method. This decision was preceded by an incident the previous year when Orlan had been rushed to hospital from a performance symposium that she had organised in Lyon and was operated on for an ectopic pregnancy. Under general anaesthesia, she had the operation filmed and then transported back to the symposium in an ambulance to be screened in place of her live appearance. This was simply another attempt, Orlan says, to "use life as a recuperable phenomenon" (Cros *et al* 2000:119).

In Newcastle, where Orlan announced her plans for surgical-performances, she exhibited images of her face fused with the chin of Botticelli's *Venus in The Birth of Venus* (ca 1480); the nose of Gerome's *Psyche in he Premier baisser de Vamour a Psyche* (ca 1820); the eyes of Diana in an anonymous Fontainebleau sculpture, *Diana chasseresse*; the lips of Gustav Moreau's *Europa in Tenlevement d'Europe* (ca 1876); and the brow of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* (ca 1503-5). Orlan intended to appropriate these images of mythical women, chosen for their intellectual qualities, rebelliousness and ambiguity as well as for being "phenotype[s] of a perspective held by the famous painters of art history" (Vanska 2002:155) for her surgical reincarnation. The *Reincarnation* project is not intended to be cosmetic: as will be seen, the artist uses surgery to work between figuration and disfiguration. Orlan's choice to use plastic surgery as a medium is intended to expose the violence inherent in the usually hidden standards and practices of feminine beautification and to thus, ultimately, challenge the power structures that privilege a phallogentric symbolic.

Orlan's development of her previous work with clothing, drapery and their relation to the body correlates directly with the treatment of the skin in her operation-performances. The operations have allowed the artist to make 'what she has' (that is, her flesh) correspond to "what she is", in other words, "...bring her object (body) and subject into

<sup>28</sup> Orlan (1998: 319-320) writes about the choice of female images that:

-Diana was chosen because she is insubordinate to the gods and men; because she is active, even aggressive, because she leads a group.

-Mona Lisa, a beacon character in the history of art, was chosen as a reference point because she is not beautiful according to present standards of beauty, because there is some 'man' under this woman. We now know it to be the self-portrait of Leonardo da Vinci that hides under that La Gioconda (which brings us back to an identity problem). [Whether or not La Gioconda is in fact Leonardo is debatable].

-Psyche because she is the antipode of Diana, invoking all that is fragile and vulnerable in us.

-Venus for embodying carnal beauty, just as Psyche embodies the beauty of the soul.

closer promiximity" (Cros *et al* 2004:122). Orlan (1998:317) says that it was upon reading the work of Lacanian psychoanalyst, Eugenie Lemoine Luccioni, *La Robe*, that the idea of actively opening up the skin like a garment came to her. At the beginning of all of her operation-performances, she reads an excerpt of Lemoine Luccioni's writing:

Skin is deceiving...In life one only has one's skin...There is a bad exchange in human relations because one never is what one has...I have the skin of an angel but I am a jackal, the skin of a crocodile but I am a poodle, the skin of a black person but I am white, the skin of a woman but I am a man; I never have the skin of what I am. There is no exception to the rule because I am never what I have (in Cros *et al* 2004:122).

Orlan also reads aloud during her operations from texts by, amongst others, Julia Kristeva, Michel Serres and Antonin Artaud whose writings, like Lemoine Luccioni's, deal with issues of identity in terms of bodily boundaries. Orlan is able to keep reading during the operations because she receives only local anaesthetic. The speaking subject and the indiscrete body that has been cut open thus function together, an unsynthesised dualism that transgresses the rules of the symbolic and the aesthetic object. I argue that the cut in the body that enables Orlan to re-member her skin without the loss of language due to pain cuts into the skin of the dominant symbolic, so to speak. That is, the unified surface of the sign is disrupted by the wound in the body that shows up the margin between surface and interior. Orlan also recuperates the myth of the Biblical Eve in her surgical performances: Eve is condemned to suffer childbirth in pain as punishment for her having eaten of the tree of knowledge (assuredly carnal knowledge). Orlan rejects the pain of literal maternity and usurps the painless privilege of the masculine artist to bring disembodied aesthetic forms into the world, although the contradiction in this is of course that Orlan is an embodied subject whose body is her artistic medium. Notably, 'operation' translates in French as *intervention*. Orlan's use of figuration/disfiguration intervenes in the ready-made body and subject, fated by innate properties to a singular gender identity.

#### 4.3.i Operation Orlan

Since 1990, Orlan has orchestrated nine plastic surgery performances on her body. Although her surgeries have been referred to as "cosmetic" (Faber 2002), I prefer the term "plastic", as the adjective describes more accurately the approach to the body as a plastic or malleable medium. The body-object is transformed by a planned and literal reinscription of the flesh. The interest for Orlan is not so much in the plastic results of the surgery, but in "the surgical operation-performance and the modified body, as venue for public debate" (1998:319). Thus, it is important that the operations are framed as performance: at each increment of the modification process, each cut and flow, an audience bears witness to the process. The modified body does not appear in its completed entirety but is shown in process. Each operation-performance has its own style, "rang[ing] from the carnivalesque...to the high tech, passing through the Baroque" (*ibid*). I will discuss Orlan's seventh and most significant operation, *Omnipresence*, in some detail but discuss briefly the content of the others.

On July 21, 1990, the first surgical performance, *Art Charnel*, was performed in a Parisian operating theatre. The theatre was decorated with hundreds of white plastic flowers (recalling the artist's previous *tableaux vivants*), a mounted photographic cut-out of Orlan as Botticelli's *Venus*, three fluorescent wigs, and a Madonna's robe. The surgeons, as in all of the operations, wore designer gowns (by Charlotte Chalderberg in *Art Charnel*).

In the operation, fat from Orlan's face and thighs was liposuctioned off. The removed fat was sealed in resin reliquaries. The reliquaries, reminiscent of early Christian saints' remains that were housed as metonymic references to the whole saintly body, allowed the sculptable matter of Orlan's body to be reorganised into "a multiplicity of being in and of many bodies" (O'Bryan 2005:15). Orlan has subsequently organised a number of reliquaries that contain the "corporeal residue of her performances" (Cros *et al* 2004:148), ten grammes of flesh to be precise, suspended in resin or preserving fluid and then mounted on panels "inscribed with well known statements by Orlan..." (*ibid*).<sup>29</sup> Larger panels with reliquaries at the centre are inscribed with a text by Michel Serres that

<sup>29</sup> Statements such as: "this is my body, this is my Software", "the body is but a costume" and "remember the future" are included.

Orlan reads in her operation-performances. The text will be repeated in as many languages as it takes to do away with the residue of Orlan's flesh. The reliquaries, displayed in soldered metal frames, are open to admiration but not to touch, which comments upon the religious and psychoanalytic taboos against touching the body or modifying its form without divine intervention in the former or regulation in the latter.

Six days after the first operation, on July 27 1990, the second operation took place. The surgeon, Cherif Kamel Zaar, "protested the excessive decor and documentary equipment used in the first surgery" (O'Bryan 2005:15), and so only one photographer was present at the second. Orlan read from Lemoine Luccioni's *La Robe* and Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* whilst she had a prosthesis inserted into her chin after Botticelli's Venus.

The third operation was undertaken in September 1990. Orlan's legs and ankles were liposuctioned and her face and eyelids were retouched. Dr Zaar insisted that Orlan receive general anaesthetic instead of a local, which obviously denied her consciousness during the procedure. Thus, a video of the first operation was projected onto the operating table during the event and the texts of dialogues with surgeons who had refused to operate on Orlan were projected onto the walls.

*Successful Operation* (see fig 16), the fourth intervention, took place on December 8 1991. Dr Zaar was replaced by the art collector Dr Bernard Cornette de Saint-Cyr, and Orlan was again able to receive local anaesthetic. The surgery was intended to embellish her lips (the lips of Europa). The silver-spangled costumes were designed by Paco Rabanne. Bowls overflowing with plastic fruit and lobsters complemented the glamour of the costumes. Orlan's one exposed breast was mirrored by a blown-up image of St Orlan's torso and head draped in white with one breast exposed. During the surgery, Orlan held a white and a black cross from her *Ska'i et Sky and Video* series, and at one point inverted the white cross as a sacrilegious gesture. The movie poster for (the non-existent) *Successful Operation* also adorned the walls of the theatre. Recycling earlier works in her operation is performative in the sense that it reiterates and reconnects the various stages of the reincarnation thus constructing methodically a radically different body and even a new identity. The entire project of reincarnation and finally, identity, are at the same time shown up through this performative strategy as artificial structures.

Orlan, in *Successful Operation*, blotted her lipstick covered lips on a piece of white cloth, making a red print before her lips were outlined and cut open in surgery and blood replaced her lipstick. Cutting of the lips is particularly disturbing, as in the work of Orlan's predecessor, French performance artist, Gina Pane.<sup>30</sup> To watch the lips being cut produces in the spectator what O'Dell (1998:45) refers to as "tactile reflexivity", which is the "simultaneous experience of being a piece of skin that touches and being a piece of skin that is touched" (*ibid*) (as in Anzieu's theory of the skin ego). Thus, when an audience watches Gina Pane cutting her lips with a razor or Orlan's lips sliced by a scalpel, the identificatory reflex is to touch one's own lips in a protective gesture. Orlan is anaesthetised, thus the pain of the operation is deferred onto the viewer who refers back to his/her own lips. Tactile reflexivity is significant to feminist performance praxis because it disrupts the scene of fantasy that is normatively projected onto the body surface, the skin, of the female body.

*The Cloak of Harlequin* (see fig 17), the fifth operation, was performed on July 6 1991. Dr Zaar was employed again for this performance, during which fat was liposuctioned from the thighs and feet. The fat that was removed was made into further reliquaries of St Orlan. Orlan's costume, designed by Franck Sorbier, consisted of a multicoloured hat and dress that resembled the Harlequin's diamond-patterned costume. The Harlequin, a figure derived from folklore, "...was a devil in his preliterate past" (Bakhtin 1965:396) who descends into hell and there "...turns somersaults, leaps and skips [and] sticks out his tongue" (*ibid*). The appropriation of the archetypal figure of duplicitous trickery is appropriate to Orlan's subversions of identity and cultural institutionalism. The Harlequin's unbounded, rude movements and gestures can be connected to the discourse on female hysteria in which the drive-ridden body is practically possessed. The specific connection that I have made to the body of the female hysteric refers more broadly to the fear of difference that threatens the regulatory schema (Butler 1993) of phallogocentric discourse and the taxonomic imagination. Orlan's consciousness during the operations allows here to "preclude a diagnosis of psychological illness (O'Bryan 2005:104)", which means that she can work in hysterical interstices of the symbolic. O'Bryan (*ibid*) concludes

<sup>30</sup> O'Dell 1998:29) says of Pane's *Psych Action*, in which she cut her lips with a razor blade, "It was as if the woman were seeking to remind herself, through touch, of the power of skin to contain and protect the body, just as Anzieu theorises. Pane herself prompted this response by showing the power of the body to destroy the sureties of containment and protection".

that, as a conscious, sentient being, "[Orlan] interacts with her circumstances and demands that her performances not be reduced to the activities of a madwoman".

Orlan's use of the Harlequin figure was prompted by Michel Serres's text, *Tiers-Instruit*. The Harlequin's multicoloured robe is "a metaphor for multiculturalism that's inclusive of all skin colours" (O'Bryan 2005:144). Orlan adopted an extract from Serres's text for the performance and the panels for multilingual reliquaries (mentioned previously):

what could the common monster, tattooed, ambidextrous, mestizo hermaphrodite, now show to us right now beneath his skin? Of course, blood and flesh. Science talks of organs, functions, cells and molecules [...] it is high time that one stopped talking of life in the laboratories... (in O'Bryan 2005:144).

Scientific knowledge and language about the body as we know it is premised upon the dissection and identification of discrete organs and systems. According to thinkers such as Artaud (1970), science chops flesh into little pieces. Harlequin's cloak, then, is the flesh of the taxonomic imagination sutured together. Grotesque and monstrous symbols, familiar to carnival, appear in the operating theatre as Orlan brandishes a plastic pitchfork and skull during the operation. The carnival atmosphere is heightened by dancer Jimmy Blanche (whose surname and black skin are amusingly contradictory) performing a strip-tease opera, composed using the Serres-text as the libretto. Video stills from the event were reworked into triptychs entitled *Seduction contre seduction*. In these triptychs, mirror images are worked off of a central photograph of Orlan striking seductive poses in her pre- or post-surgery wear. The outline of a cross is superimposed over the glossy doubled images: images that are visually seductive because they are glossy and high resolution but are also uncanny because they are close ups of flesh cut and bleeding in surgery. The grainy black and white central images show Orlan, with bandaged visage, in parodic feminine-seductive poses. The images, played off against each other, interrogate the mechanism whereby the reproducible image, framed and fragmented, comes to stand in for the body. Pacteau (1994: 60) states that: "The creation of a perfect femininity [by a male creator] arises out of a desire for omniscience, which is also a desire for a kind of omnipresence" Orlan's manipulation of her own image reverses the performative operations of desire and seduction inherent in image-making that has been an operation dominated by masculinist desire and dependent upon feminine passivity.

## no

The sixth operation was performed during a performance festival in Liege, Belgium, in February 1992. Excerpts from Antonin Artaud's text: *To Have Done With the Judgement of God*, were read. In the text, Artaud writes of a "Body without Organs", or a body remade whole without being compartmentalised into functions:

Man is sick because he is badly constructed.

We must make up our minds to strip him bare in order to scrape off the animacule that itches him mortally,

god,

and with god

his organs (Artaud 1976:570).

During the performance, three skulls adorned the theatre and Orlan brandished a plastic pitchfork (O'Bryan 2005). The images are congruent with the carnivalesque inversions of the high (closed and proper) body to the low (grotesque) body that has been seen to be an element of Orlan's aesthetic. Hence, the grotto-esque wound to the body that would bring death outside of surgical conditions is celebrated by the conscious subject. In a vivisection without death as it were, "the orator, the text and the subject being flayed are one and the same person" (O'Bryan 2005: 97). Orlan, holding a plastic skull, celebrates the death's-head as she is able to defy the limits of the social body and of organic life (a defiance of time, really) in her reincarnation.

The body re-made is incarnated from the inside out, a notion echoed in Artaud's writings (after he had experienced the Peyote rituals of the Tarahumara in Mexico in 1936). Artaud describes the drug-induced vision of the autarchic [self generating] body in the following:

with Peyote MAN is alone, desperately scraping out the music of his own skeleton, without father, mother, family, love, god, or society. And with no living being to accompany him. And the skeleton is not of bone but of skin, like a skin that walks. And one walks from the equinox to the solstice, buckling on one's own humanity (Artaud in Connor 2001:45, emphasis in original)

The reimagined body wears its skin on the inside and its skeleton like a second skin, or armour: "[this] unthinkable body, at once flayed and reskinned, in which the skin bears the weight of intrinsic being rather than the traces of extrinsic meaning, allows one to be made from the inside out rather than the outside in" (Connor 2001:45). Orlan's project, which entails what I would describe as an opening up of ontological space with the remaking of the body and the symbolic structures that underpin language formation, is not directed at validating the dichotomy of inside/outside; intrinsic/extrinsic; good/evil; life/death. Rather, her work confounds and baffles these very categories.

*Omnipresence*, the seventh operation-performance, took place on November 21, 1993, in New York. This surgery is considered to be the apotheosis of Orlan's surgical interventions, and I will discuss it in some detail in the following section.

Performances eight and nine were follow-up surgeries to *Omnipresence*. In the eighth operation, Orlan used her blood to finger paint self-portraits. The self portraits substantiate the claim that Orlan's body (and its abject substances) is her medium and her tool. The crude portraits also point to the dialectic between figuration and disfiguration inherent in Carnal Art. The ninth operation, which also took place in New York, was performed to do some touch-ups and to gather fat for more reliquaries. Orlan also imprinted her portrait on shrouds of gauze that were used to soak up her blood and body fluids during the operations. These 'holy shrouds' are reminiscent of the Turin shroud upon which Christ's facial imprint supposedly appears. However, the image upon the mysterious shrouds, like Orlan's reincarnated body, is dependent upon technology for its production: "...the material substance of [Orlan's] body remains on the fabric, but she must resort to technological means to make her face appear" (Cros *et al* 2004:154). Thus, the body and its image are denaturalised, hybrid creations that disavow an origin (in the sense of a transcendent, higher authority or being) except the fragmented non-origin of the subject that is, and is not, Orlan.

Orlan plans to do two more operation-performances in her *Reincarnation* series. She anticipates having the tenth surgery in Japan and will have an enormous nose constructed, starting in the middle of her forehead, in the style of a pre-Columbian Mayan mask (Faber 2002:86). At this point, it remains technically impossible to construct a nose

of such proportions for Orlan's face. The final surgery that she envisions "...[will be...] lighter, more poetic" (Ayers 2000:182). This performance will not be a plastic surgery like the others, but will involve her body being opened and closed whilst she performs (under local anaesthetic): "In my work, the first deal I have with surgeon is, 'no pain'. I wanted to show this body, opened up, and produce lots of photographs of me there, laughing, playing, reading etcetera, while the body is opened up...I want to remain serene and happy and distant" (2000:183). I will argue, through a detailed discussion of *Omnipresence*, that Orlan's desire to remain "serene and happy and distant" is an assertion of agency over the means to the production of language and discourse, specifically in terms of the production of an anoedipal, feminist morphological imaginary, ethics and performance paradigm.

#### 4.4 *Omnipresence*: the making of a woman-to-woman transsexual



Fig 4: *Omnipresence*; video screen view from the Gering Gallery, New York ([www.googleimages.co.za](http://www.googleimages.co.za))



Fig. 5 *Omnipresence: the second mouth* ([www.google.co.za](http://www.google.co.za))

*Omnipresence* was performed in New York and was broadcast via satellite to the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, the McLuhan Centre in Toronto, the Multi-Media Centre in Banff and a dozen other sites "...with which we were in contact by means of interactive



**Fig. 6 *Omnipresence*: Reading of text by Lemoine Luccioni with sign interpreter in the background;**  
**Fig. 7 Orlan's facial skin is lifted ([both images www.googleimages.co.za](http://www.googleimages.co.za))**

#### 4.4.i Woman-to- woman

Orlan has described her surgical reincarnation as "doing a woman-to-woman transexualism..." (1998:318). This formulation has relevance to *Omnipresence*, as the site of the face as a place to be cut and opened raises issues of sexual difference in terms of disrupting the formulation of an exclusive interior/ exterior and attendant Oedipal structures of castration. Let me unpack this claim further with specific reference to *Omnipresence*.

As Orlan's face appears to be lifted off the underlying muscle during *Omnipresence* we are presented with two moments or perspectives of viewing. We see at once the interior and exterior of the body, a moment that is uncanny and indeed repulsive because the body-object is no longer coherent nor cohesive. As the skin is flayed from the face, the facial mask that identifies the subject seems to be suspended, monstrously open and disorganised. The hostility that has frequently greeted Orlan's operation-performances is not unlike the repulsion expressed in mainstream discourse for transsexuals whose ambiguity is

Hirschhorn (1996: 117) cites several patronising criticisms of Orlan as: 'a slightly plump woman who is deliberately becoming ugly'; 'a beautiful woman who is deliberately becoming ugly' or '46 and still rather ugly- even after six operations..her pug-like face would need something more than the skill of a surgeon's knife to reach the Grecian ideal of perfection'.

intolerable. A cut in the body that is aimed at shifting the readability of sexual difference disrupts a deeply entrenched cultural sensibility in western ontology that organises identity in terms of hierarchical sexual difference. However, Orlan's transsexualism is not aimed at reconstructing a genitalised gender identity. In order to qualify for a sex change, transsexual operative candidates have to prove that they suffer from gender dysphoria, and the only way to 'cure' their psychosis is to reassign gender through surgery (Griggs 1999). Surgery and psychology meet in this ethical quandary, as the justification for sex reassignment surgery is produced within the tenets of a discourse that relies on an inside/outside dichotomy and in which 'health' relies on an isomorphic fit between inside and outside. This logic infers that until the 'gap' between an imagined interior (that, for example, 'inside' my female body is a trapped male body) and exterior appearance is closed (that is, a genital 'match' is surgically constructed) the subject is incomplete and psychologically unintegrated. Female to male and male to female transsexualism, then, becomes a choice between having the phallus [constructed] in the former and becoming the phallus in the latter.



Fig. 8: Orlan's bloodied face during *Omnipresence*

The inability to 'close the gap' between inside/outside is precisely the dilemma of women, whose anatomical sex is discursively produced as open, mutable and castrated or lacking. The grotto or cave of the female sex is extended to Orlan's exploration of the interior of her body and particularly her face through her surgical performances. However, Orlan's self-ascribed transsexual body confounds a singular phallic economy in which the female body is reproduced as the [same] phallic fetish. A radically new morphological imaginary is called for by Orlan's practice: as her face is lifted off her flesh, the head is invaginated. Interior and exterior are no longer isomorphic. It would seem that a kind of gender dysphoria is necessary to the re-imagining of a subject beyond the Oedipal myth and paternal law. That is, nowhere can it be assumed that there is a fixed correlation between genitalia (sex) and gender other than as a regulatory ideal (cf Foucault 1976; Butler 1993).

The performed invagination of the face-wound specifically in Orlan's surgical performances cuts directly into the privileged characteristic of individual identity in western cultures, that is, the face. Hirschhorn (1996: 129), in a discussion of the thinking of Deleuze and Guattari on faciality, asserts that: "the social production of the face is what constitutes our entire secular landscape, which is why it is absurd to suggest that the semiotic of either the signifier or the subjective operates through the body— unless that body has been entirely facialised". The specific organisation of sociality that is the face (*ibid*) is displaced by Orlan's treatment both of her corpus as a palimpsest and by the inversion between face and genitalia. In a return to the Medusa's head, the abyss or cloaca that is the threat of the female sex is imaged as Orlan's face is pulled away from her head. Her monologue continues and she looks directly at the lens of the camera that photographs her or beams the operation to galleries and venues around the world. The space or black hole between skin and flesh does not halt Orlan's speech, the flesh it seems will be made word via the opening and closing of the body surface, the soft tool that is the flesh.

Orlan essentially abjects her body in her performances. Abjection results in the creation of new bodily boundaries through the expulsion of materials from the body. Orlan is clearly constructing new bodily boundaries in her project. Because she is changing the contours of her own skin via cut and suture, language is forced to play catch-up with the 'new' body which, like the cyborg body, "is not innocent...: [the cyborg body] does not seek unitary identity and so generate antagonistic dualisms without end [ ],it takes irony for granted" (Haraway 1991:180). As is evident in the exposure of her recovery process following *Omnipresence*, Orlan's performances rely on temporality for effect and process as a methodology (that is, the subject is always in process). Orlan tampers with the boundaries between the semiotic and the symbolic. The female body, Orlan's living skin, displaces the phallus as the primary tool of symbolic inscription.



**Fig. 9 Orlan's bandaged face and Fig. 10 Orlan's post-operative appearance ([www.google.co.za](http://www.google.co.za))**

#### 4.4.ii Audience

Intercepting the comfortable gaze of the audience is achieved by Orlan most obviously because the image of a body and particularly a face being flayed whilst alive and talking is horrifying. Horror as a film genre most often relies upon transgressions of the inner/outer bodily boundaries to both fascinate and repulse the viewer. What makes Orlan's performance almost unbearable, or horrifying, is that she talks and laughs under anaesthetic whilst her body is cut and bleeding: she appears to be enjoying the spectacle, like a corpse that talks. Orlan (1998:315) states that if an image forces us to close our eyes: "...the eyes become black holes in which the image is absorbed willingly or by force. These images plunge in and strike directly where it hurts, without passing through the habitual filters, as if the eyes no longer had any connection with the brain". The spectacle of Orlan's body-in-operation transgresses conventional, discrete aesthetic borders. The spectacle of her specifically female body transgresses the borders of classical mimesis and identarian structures. The scopic impulse of theatre and the visual arts is interrogated by the graphic spectacle of the flesh— we want to look, we are fascinated, but the grotesque body pushes at the limits of power-knowledge-pleasure regimes by refusing the closure of the image. Another way in which Orlan problematises the process of image-making and its reception is by using technology in her performances. Again, Orlan may provoke the ire of some feminists who view technology as the product and effect of gross global patriarchy. However, Orlan's use of technology explores the potential of the virtual realm to be co-opted as an effective tool for the production and dispersal of new modes of feminist communication. True to her use of Baroque duality, high and low are juxtaposed in *Omnipresence* so that state of the art technology meets grotesque flesh, high theory meets the carnival and the sacred meets the profane. Technology is used in order to sculpt the

'software' of Orlan's body and as a mode of communication with an international audience. Internet and satellite connections to audiences in international cities dispersed the scene of *Omnipresence* into a virtual realm: the omnipresence of God and the panopticon is parodied in the technocratic realisation of being 'everywhere at once'.

Interventions in flesh are difficult to watch, particularly within a performance framework, because scientific 'objectivity' is absent as a frame of reference. On the one hand, the separation between artist and audience and between performance and reception spaces may serve to maintain an imagistic theatrical structure. However, the production of an image that bleeds and swells is a contradiction in terms as the surface of the image (and therefore the image itself) is ruined by the refusal of closure. Orlan follows up her interventions with lectures and panel discussions, during which she shows video and photographic footage of the performances. She also documents the recovery process with daily photographs (usually taken over the period of 41 days, which refers to the conventional time for quarantine). Reception to her work is sometimes hostile, especially from feminists who regard body modification and plastic surgery as tools of patriarchal domination. Miglietti (2003:176) states that:

During [Orlan's] lectures/performances, she obliges the spectator to witness a surgical operation and, simultaneously, an intervention upon language, a dimension of total transformation, in which mutation acts upon her own body, upon language, upon the dead body of art, and on the minds of the spectators.

Miglietti reiterates that Orlan defies deeply entrenched western taboos against touching or modifying the body. Orlan (1998:315) suggests that when one watches one of her performances, "...you do what you probably do when you watch the news on television. It is a question of not letting yourself be taken in by the images and of continuing to reflect about what is behind these images". The detachment that we may feel when watching the television news, which daily documents gory atrocities, is absent from the viewing frame when we witness the conscious Orlan's face being sliced open and still speaking as the operation is documented. The audience are drawn into a fold relationship whereby we have to confront horror and fascination. This brings to bear the taboo of the monstrous feminine that emerges in a conventional rubric as the prototypical monster (here again the Medusa): Orlan's audiences are confronted with an image that cannot be categorised and,

"[confronted by the sight of the monstrous, the viewing subject is put into crisis: boundaries, designed to keep the abject at bay, threaten to disintegrate, collapse]" (Hirschhorn 1996:126).

#### 4.4.iii The body is obsolete

Orlan has said repeatedly that the body is obsolete (1998, 2004). In this view, the body is a crude machine that cannot keep pace with our software, that is, intelligence. Orlan has said that her body is her software, an inversion of the Cartesian dualism that privileges mind over body. By rendering the body a form of intelligence, as Orlan does, the boundaries of sex and gender can be transgressed and, in so doing, the margins of domination and gendered privilege disrupted. It may be asked whether such extreme measures are necessary and whether narcissistic actions are the only means whereby feminist performance artists can avoid assimilation into a phallogentric rubric. Indeed, Orlan's surgeries may be viewed as mutilations and her rejection of the 'obsolete' body as somatophobic. However, such interpretations I think value Orlan's project within the very framework that the artist fights against. She states that: "...being a narcissist isn't easy when the question is not of loving your own image but of re-creating the self through deliberate acts of alienation" (Orlan in Hirschhorn 1996:111). The self reflexive narcissist, that is, Orlan, deliberately alienates her subjectivity from any privileged origin by destroying and remaking the image of the body. Orlan both perpetuates the narcissistic persona in the technocratic reproduction of her own image whilst the incessant copying of that image in photographic and digital media undermines the notion of an essential self, hence absencing the narcissist and undermining the discrete ego. The body is obsolete insofar as its interpretation and manifestation in the scientific discourses of sex, psychoanalysis and medicine have been severely limited and regulated. That is, the subject perceived as rational, coherent and masculine is an obsolete formation. Indeed, Zurbrugg (2001) is of the opinion that the postmodern technocratic body renders the skin as an *interface* obsolete, for the boundaries of the body have been dissolved by science and technology.

For Orlan, the discretion between the human and machine body is no longer viable in the present era of high technology- the integration of machinery and the body is producing hybrid, cyborg subjects. This in a sense frees the subject up from the question of

identity and also puns on the notion of the phallic woman, seen previously in the paintbrush-wielding female in *A poil/sans poil* and the Medusa of *Documentary Study* who threatens castration. In *Woman...*Orlan's body is desexualised because it appears to be absent. The 'talking head' is a play upon logos and rational, cerebral authority that is privileged in the mind/body dualism above the body and particularly the indiscrete female body. The image of Orlan's head epitomises the disembodied individual, but we know that this image is an illusion, for the body remains elsewhere, so that even as she speaks, Orlan's words and visage are mere reflections of a transient, hybrid becoming.

### **Conclusion**

It can be seen that Orlan's performance project is focussed upon herself and yet, as she focuses exclusively upon her own body/image, she undermines the idea that she is a 'self in the sense of being 'one'. Orlan stages contradiction in the redefinition of her flesh: she negates identity in that she is distanced radically from paternal or maternal origins, and Oedipalised subjectivity, and yet her actions result from her overarching will to power, as if it were. The body is treated as a sack or costume to be cast off and remade, yet the body is also assumed as a form of intelligence. The body is a tool, and it is also a soft surface. For me, these contradictions situate Orlan as a feminist performance artist, for it is the ability to maintain the interstitial space of contradiction that enables body-centred feminist performance artists to deconstruct phallogocentric representational economies most effectively. The contradictory position (not really a 'position' at all) enables these performance artists to interrogate phallogocentric structures at the edge of regulation, that is, by taking up the title 'artist', they are able to debunk the gender-biased standards that have excluded the other from the fold of artistic mastery. Moreover, the Baroque 'fold', as an image of contradiction that Orlan exploits, is relevant to feminist praxis in that it offers a means of envisioning and representing a non-hierarchical morphological imaginary whereby the doubling of the female sex is not relegated to the monstrous and the taboo, that is, pushed aside by a monological imaginary. The polymorphous performing body of Orlan, then becomes a polyvocal body rather than merely a syncretic formulation, for historical voices operate through the flesh of the artist.

The process of deliberately becoming an other (/ is an other) reverses the formulation of word made flesh: as the Orlan-body is reincarnated, flesh presses against

the limits of discourse. The Orlan-body shifts the situation of phallic power in a distinctly masculine morphology, for Orlan uses her body in order to re-inscribe the body into representation (as if the body were phallic). However, her medium is always doubled, contradictory- the body is phallic *and* vocalic, one *and* other.

In Chapter Six, I turn to look at the work of a performance artist, Annie Sprinkle, who is quite different from Orlan. However, both artists will be seen to engage in the de- and re-construction of their flesh against the phallic imaginary.

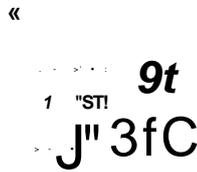


Fig. 11 *African Self Hybridisation: Three-Headed Ogoni Mask, Nigeria, With Mutant Face of Franco-European Woman* (2002) ([www.google.co.za](http://www.google.co.za))

Fig. 12 *Woman with Head* (1996) ([www.google.co.za](http://www.google.co.za))

Fig. 13 *MesuRAGES* (1974) (Luc Wauman)

'TTfrr:

,S, «V" ^,»\*

Figs 14 and 15 *Skai and Sky et video* (1983) (Jean Paul Lefret)

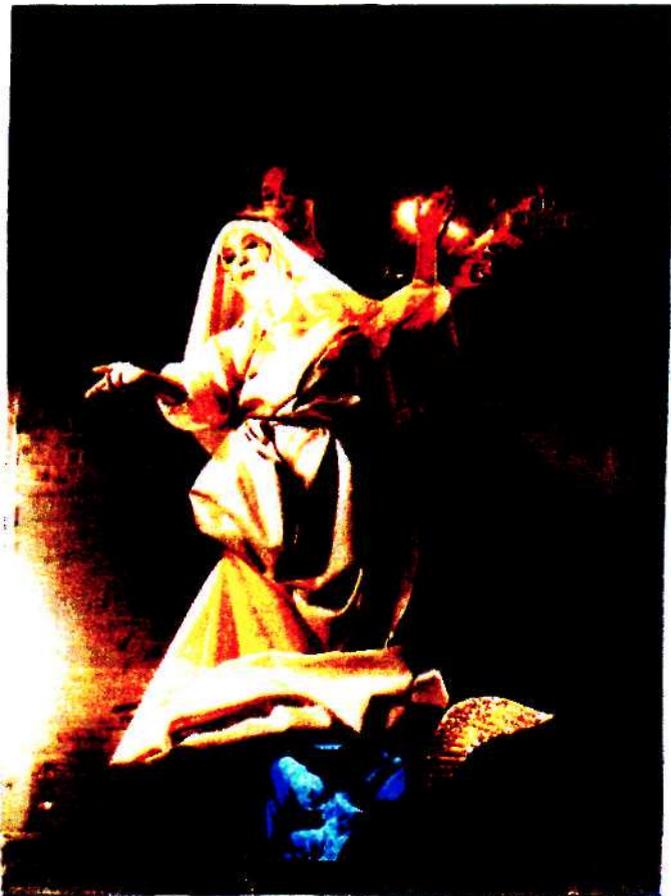


Fig. 16 *Successful Operation* (July 6, 1991). (Alain Dohme, Sipa Press)

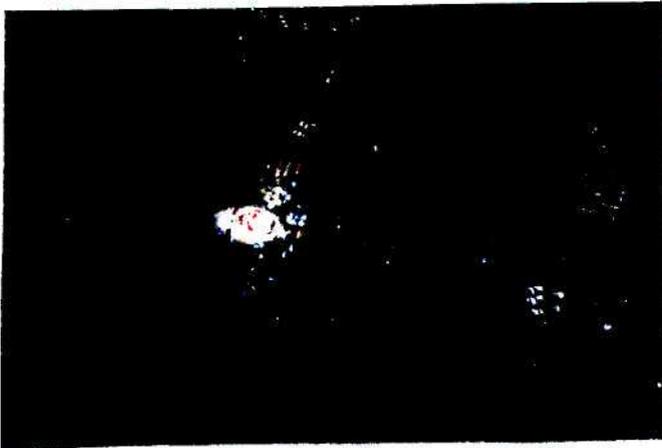


Fig. 17 *The Cloak of Harlequin* (Dec 8,1991) (Orlan)

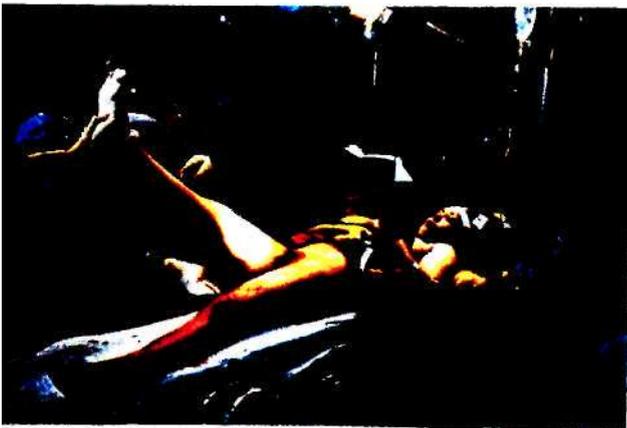
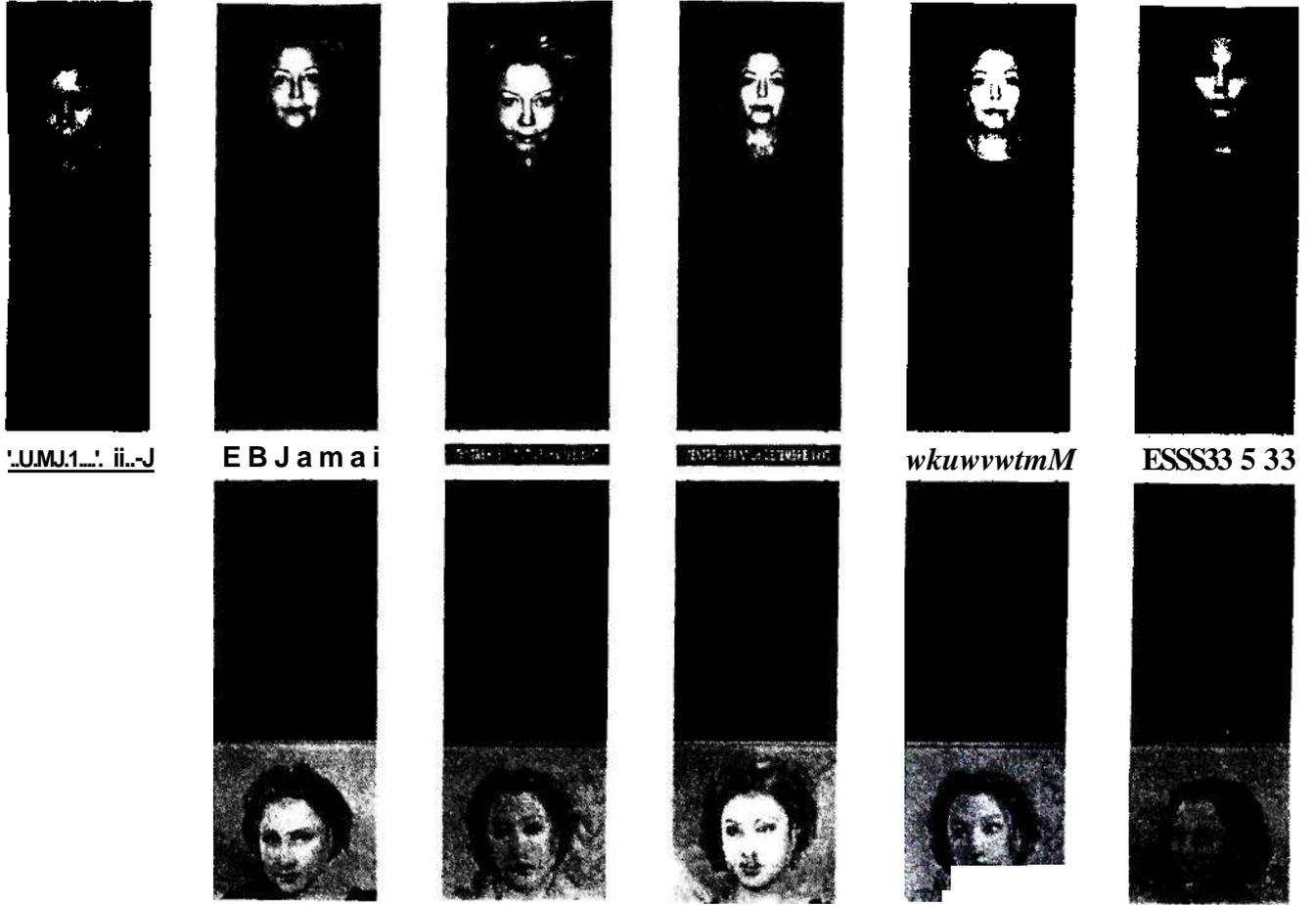


Fig. 18 *Omnipresence*: Needle of anaesthetising syringe in npper lip (Vladimir Sichov, Sipa Press)

A oiH

r<sup>f</sup> ^

Fig. 19 *Omnipresence: installation of diptychs at the Sandra Gering Gallery documenting Orlan's recovery over 41 days (Nov-Dec 1994) (Raphael Cuir)*



## Chapter Five

### Post porn modernism: performing the whore in the art of Annie Sprinkle

#### Introduction

Annie Sprinkle, like Orlan, is a self-named multimedia performance artist.<sup>33</sup> Sprinkle has been based in New York for most of her career. Unlike Orlan, she did not have a formal arts training initially, but began her career in the commercial sex trade as a prostitute, porn star and stripper. Orlan's *Le Baiser*, that has been discussed, drew an analogy between art and prostitution. In a sense, Sprinkle approaches the issue of representation from a position quite opposite to, though not incongruous with, Orlan.

In this chapter, I analyse several of Sprinkle's performances and question how these may be seen to transgress the limits of the phallogentric symbolic. I also interrogate the cultural divisions between art and pornography. In so-doing, I pursue the notion that 'binary terror' (Schneider 1997), induced by the collapsing of categories such as art and porn, may not be indicative of the fear of social disorder *per se* but indicates rather a reaction to the antithetical and specifically the 'disorder' rooted historically in the female body. I maintain the connection of Sprinkle's performance practice to a historical context for, particularly in the mid 1980s, *avant garde* art venues, especially in New York, included shows that made a distinctive cross-over to explicit content reserved previously for pornography.'

Sprinkle's refusal to identify exclusively with established or socially sanctioned categories of art/pornography, feminine/feminist provokes questions related to Orlan's transgressions of the body's surface and interrogations of the embodied feminine subject. Sprinkle, like Orlan, uses flesh as a site of provocation in order to destabilise dominant discursive

<sup>33</sup> Sprinkle's given name is Ellen Steinberg.

<sup>34</sup>

Schneider (1997:11) states that: *[discretionary] boundaries defining supposedly discrete centres -porn and art- were laid on top of each other, resulting in an interrogation not only of form and content, but of function and frame. In much of this work- especially work wielding the label feminist'- it is the pornographised object, the woman in front of the camera, who is reincarnated as artist.*

structures that produce the female body as such. Ayers (2000: 174) comments, in comparing Sprinkle and Orlan: "Annie Sprinkle...has concentrated [...] exclusively upon her own flesh as a medium, though for her this has meant display and manipulation rather than surgery". If Sprinkle's flesh is her material, then sex is her medium, which will be seen to counter radically the entrenched myth of the masculine artistic genius as virile creator.

### **5.1 Representation, resistance and transgression**

Annie Sprinkle describes herself a 'post porn modernist'. The title, I think, implies an element of self-mockery as well as a humorous reference to the pretensions of the established western art world. The sedimented authority of the art academy is simultaneously evoked and undermined by the act of self-naming and in Sprinkle's self-definition as whore, performance artist and sex-goddess. Sprinkle's self-definition and the development of an idiosyncratic discourse that is centred around the experience of embodied pleasure is transgressive because, for one, the ubiquity of the male phallus and female sexual pleasure is disconnected. Sprinkle's pansexuality threatens the exclusive intelligibility of oedipalised heterosexuality and her use of the performance medium to articulate publically transgressive sexuality in itself transgresses the theatrical paradigm. A distinction between transgression and resistance needs to be made here: resistance is a passage through a bounded system, opposition in this instance is articulated from within as a push against the boundaries of discursive normality. Transgression, on the other hand, relies upon rupture. Transgression implies the crossing of boundaries and a radical break from hegemony. Schneider (1997) contends that resistance and transgression are genderised terms: she claims that women are socialised into passivity whereby, from childhood, women learn to resist rather than transgress whilst boys and men, including male artists, are conceded the right to transgress in order to assert individual authority (exemplified by, as Schneider (1997) calls them, the elitist 'bad boy modernist' club).

In art, this genderised distinction is no different. In western civilisation, female flesh has been represented ad nauseum in masculinist cultural iconography that de- and re-sexualises the female body under the mark of phallic authority. Western art canons are virtually centred around the image of female flesh rendered by the phallic male artist. Thus, when women come to represent their own bodies in any explicit sense it is

scandalous precisely because it dislodges the prerogative of the male genius for remaining the dominant image-maker within a masculine symbolic. It is particularly scandalous, in a word, transgressive, when a female performance artist such as Sprinkle re/presents her body as a live spectacle. In turn, showing up the prostitute female body begs the question of the logic of late capitalist consumerism, for the insatiable desires of commodity culture cannot be removed from the view and representation of the female body as a sexualised and sexually insatiable object.

Indeed, the prostitute body became a favoured motif of modernist 'realism'. The body of commercial sex signalled the ruination, for the modernists, of Romanticism's aesthetic frippery. The 'reality' inherent in the prostitute body is also the exposure of the modes of exchange of late capitalism, for the prostitute body, as commodified object and wage labourer, closes the gap between worker and commodity. In the case of the prostitute body, there is no clear distinction between the commodity object and the worker whose labour produced it, which is really the paradigmatic 'problem', if not provocation, of both prostitution and performance art whereby the dialectical tensions between producer and produced are exposed in the image of the prostitute/performer's body. Schneider (1997:52) defines the dialectical image as: "Objects that show the show, which make it apparent that they are not entirely that which they have been given to represent—the way that cracks in face paint or runs in mascara might show the material in tension with the constructed ideal". Both the prostitute and the performance artist show the show of their commodification/objectification because their bodies are 'bought into', so to speak, as objects that are invested with the fantasies and projections of an audience, be that audience one or many. However, when the object of erotic labour herself, that is, 'the whore', shifts the frame of her work into the realm of performance, the sedimentation of the whore as icon of depravity and anti-aestheticism is radically disrupted. That is, when the quintessential abject body of the whore takes up the authorial position, in this case in performance art, the privilege of the canonical masculine artist is threatened, particularly because the whore (like the lesbian and witch) is traditionally a site for displacements of masculine anxieties about female sexual power, aggression and excess. Sprinkle's performances, as will be elaborated upon, are transgressive because she occupies an interstitial cultural space between theatre and pornography.

### 5.Li Skin flicks

Before her crossover from pornography to performance art, a cross-over that is not exclusive in her work, Annie Sprinkle had featured in numerous porn films, nude and fetish magazines and had travelled the American burlesque circuit. Sprinkle is adamant that she was never coerced into the commercial sex industry, but that being a whore was a mutually beneficial arrangement for clients and herself as a "horny masseuse who simply ended up having sex with the clients" (Sprinkle 1998:25). Such a flippant statement belies the profoundly political encounter with the whore-body, as Mack (2003:33) states: "all bodyfucks are headfucks first"— but more on sexual politics later.<sup>33</sup> Sprinkle entered the mainstream porn industry in the early 1970s whilst it was still predominantly underground. After performing in over a hundred films, Sprinkle decided that, in order to redress the stereotypical depictions of women in porn, women who "...were generally pursued and manipulated into sex" (Sprinkle 1998:33), she would direct her own porn film. Sprinkle (*ibid*) describes how she intended her film, titled *Deep Inside Annie Sprinkle* (1982), to differ from mainstream male-centred porn:

...in my movie, I was the sexual aggressor, I was the one who wanted it- and the men better watch out! Most male directors never gave us actresses the time to have real orgasms...Lots of people at the time didn't even believe women actually had orgasms. People barely knew where the clit was, if they knew there was a clit at all. Scenes in most porn movies climaxed with the male cum shot. But in my film I featured the female orgasm.'

Merely displacing the male figure as sexual aggressor is not particularly spectacular, but in *Deep Inside...*, Sprinkle practised a mimetic 'looking back' at the camera's eye/the viewer. This challenged the convention of a masculine-scopic gaze which is instated in modern lens-based media. Sprinkle deliberately destabilises the fantasy of anonymous intimacy, of being able to look 'deep inside', promised by commercial pornography when she 'invites'

''' Suffice to say, Sprinkle's statement is difficult to recuperate for academic purposes without opening up the proverbial 'can of worms' upon the fraught arena of sex, which is always bound to power relations and their negotiation/abuse/transgression and a variety of pleasures, fears and fantasies.

Sprinkle goes on to describe how she cast friends and her real-life lover in the film, and that there was no acting *per se*. Sprinkle spoke directly into the camera so as to 'interact' with the viewer. The film also

the viewer into her house, where she shows a personal photo album which contains photographs of herself as a child and a young woman. Rather than allowing the viewer/voyeur to assume that her glamorous whore persona is the real, original woman, the inane photos foreground the constructed nature of her identity and of the pornographic fantasy. The spoken text also reminds the viewer that it is Sprinkle who has 'created' her personal transformation for personal gain. The motif of performative transformation, almost a reversal of the Pygmalion stereotype, is reiterated in later work by Sprinkle who exposes rather than obscures the construction of surface-identity.

Whilst producing 'feminist porn' (anti-porn feminists would argue that this is a contradiction in terms) does not displace misogynist forms thereof, the device of direct address does shift the pornographic frame. The pornographic subject, Sprinkle, refuses to 'fit into' the film's scenography; instead she is the site/sight of the film who conflates the personal with the pornographic. That is, she views the development of her hypersexual pornographic persona as a continuum of Ellen Steinberg that in effect demystifies the fetishised pornographic body, normatively removed from a material or historical context. The form of autobiographical monologue has become a familiar feature of feminist performance art. In Sprinkle's film, the impulse to develop an autobiographical, feminist discourse on sexuality appears in an early and undeveloped form.

Kauffman (1998:73) states that pornography and science are both 'perverse implantations' that rely upon 'repetition and experimentation'. Both science and pornography, she states, "...isolate objects or events from their contexts in time and space in order to concentrate on a specific activity or quantified functions. Both murder to dissect". All these traits porn and science share with cinema, for the male gaze freezes the look on the erotic image. What Sprinkle attempted to do in *Deep Inside...* was to subvert the conventional 'male gaze' by addressing the camera directly and also by including numerous full-body shots that did not dissect her body into numerous eroticised parts. The device of direct address interrupts and to some extent disarms the 'male gaze', for the erotic image speaks for herself rather than being spoken for. The articulate body and the reflexive gaze also break with the porn convention of scrutinising the body in terms of various dislocated orifices whereby the pornographised female body becomes a succession

featured female ejaculation, a pornography-first, although Sprinkle did not know what this was at the time. The film was the second biggest grossing adult feature of 1982 and made Sprinkle into a 'star'.

of mouth/vagina/anus; receptive and passivised. The 'narrative' (pornography is infamous for its 'weak' narrative developments) also subverts a more traditional male-identified development whereby the 'protagonist' is male and the climax/es of the action are centred around the visual 'evidence' of male ejaculation (the stock 'money shot'). Indeed, it is essential in standard pornography to include a money shot. The pornographic genre is underpinned by a frenzied drive towards scopic visibility (Williams 1989), which of course means that women, in heterosexual porn, are typically found to be lacking the visual currency of the phallus. Sprinkle's film is no less explicit than standard pornography but, particularly in her display of female onanism, the objective is not to 'spend' male ejaculate but to pleasure herself, in her own time, and without phallic intervention. Here again there are whole-body shots that do not centre the gaze exclusively around the 'quantified' (or quantifiable) function of phallic climax. The use of female masturbation in *Deep Inside...* is hardly groundbreaking in itself and does not necessarily undermine the ubiquity of the fetishised female body and the 'male gaze.'" However, the masturbation that is featured in the film anticipates Sprinkle's later performances in which she is perhaps able to realise the use of female onanism as a political tool more fully.

#### 5.1.ii Feminism and pornography: an uneasy alliance

The etymology of the word 'pornography' is the 'description of the life, manners, *et cetera* of prostitutes or their patrons' (OED), from the Greek *graphos* (writing/description) and *porneia* (prostitution). Brown (in Williams 1989:30) gives a contemporary definition of pornography as: "a coincidence of sexual phantasy, genre and culture in an erotic organisation of visibility". As can be seen, pornography and prostitution have been linked historically in terms of representation. The drive to pathologise bodies in the nineteenth century in particular figured the female body, and especially the prostitute body, as a curious site of deviance (*cf* Terry and Urla 1995, introduction). The solution prescribed for female deviance was maternity (within marriage). The prostitute body, like the hysterical body, is anti-maternal due to the supposed excess of sexual energy that suffuses the bodies of both. Again, we are straddling socially engineered binary structures between the clean and proper body and the abject,

Kauffman (1998:73) states that: "The male gaze does not spring from omnipotence but from fear: man assuages his own fears of castration by projecting those fears onto woman, turning her into an object of voyeurism and/or fetish object".

for: "[t]he somatic territorialising of deviance, since the nineteenth century, has been part of a larger effort to organise social relations according to categories denoting normality versus aberration, health versus pathology, and natural security versus social danger (ibid: 1)". The prostitute's body is thus, by definition, a deviant body and pornography, from an etymological point, is the representation of deviance and deviant bodies. Sprinkle's project is to invert the negative terms of 'whore' via the construction of discourses of pleasure that are not orientated around the central role of the Oedipal phallus and the object-body of the mother. Thus, her project can be linked explicitly to Orlan's in the rejection of essential womanhood/the maternal, and can also be seen to provoke liberal and radical feminist camps who view pornography as inextricably 'bad' or harmful for women. However, it is clear that we are attempting to move away from defining what 'types' of women are acceptable or intelligible for feminist forms of representation.

For Sprinkle, the multiple possibilities of pleasure and the explicit representation thereof have enabled her to interrogate the structures of domination and pleasure that operate in pornographic representation and in 'everyday life'. The images that Sprinkle produces are not unequivocally 'feminist', they certainly do not belong to the school of cultural feminism that celebrates a rather nebulous version of female identity. Sprinkle celebrates the grotesque, freakish, disproportionate, fetishised, abject body (her own and others) in order to explore a multitude of erotic possibilities and to push skin beyond a singular identity-envelope.

It is in pornography, unlike in canonical art and erotica, that the culturally veiled markers of sexual difference, genitalia, are on full display. Diamond (1980:188) writes: "[I] suggest that pornography is primarily a medium for expressing norms about male power and domination, thereby functioning as a social control mechanism for keeping women in a subordinate status". It is literally the phallus that dominates the structures of 'straight' porn whereas in other cultural forms, the phallic imperative [and the masculine gaze] is obscured in its ubiquity. Pornography, then, literally and explicitly exposes the symbolic structures of the dominant phallographic libidinal economy: he who has phallus (subject) controls pleasure whilst she who-is-phallus (object) lacks symbolic authority. However, Kaite (1995:18) explains that, within the context of standard pornography: "The surface exposure and exposure of surface, is really a poor attempt to hide pornography's asceticism, that is, its ritual sacrifices, forfeitures, renunciations, and disavowals, and these

of the masculine subject". We are not so far off, then, from the representational structures of conventional art and theatre. Sarakinsky (1995:146) cites Mackinnon's definition of pornography as:

The graphic, sexually explicit subordination of women through pictures or words, that also includes women dehumanised as sexual objects, things or commodities, enjoying pain or humiliation or rape, being tied up, cut up, mutilated, bruised or physically hurt in postures of sexual submission and servility or display, reduced to body parts, penetrated by objects or animals, or presented in scenarios of degradation, injury or torture, shown as filthy or inferior, bleeding, bruised or hurt in a context that makes these conditions sexual...

It seems that in the above definition we are also not far off, so to speak, from the aesthetics of performance art wherein the abjection of the body/subject is used in order to interrogate meaning, desire and gendered subjectivity. Perhaps the clearest shift for Sprinkle from porn to performance art is in the reflexive moment whereby sex and sexuality have become political issues for her. I argue again that the female body within patriarchal structures is already always de- and re-sexualised: the condition of the female body *vis a vis* Mackinnon's "scenarios of degradation" is to be reinterpreted in the negative terms of phallogocentric discourse. (This is not to say that men's bodies are never objectified or sexualised but that there is a distinction between the sexualisation of feminine and masculine flesh that is peculiar to the ordering of imaginary and material structures within patriarchy). Sprinkle, particularly in her post porn modernist performances, plays the pornographic form back against itself in order to reinterpret (her experience of) female sexuality as a plethora of pleasures and intersubjective identifications.

In the following section in which I write about Annie Sprinkle's live 'strip speak' shows which are precursors to her performance art career, I consider how Sprinkle 'opens up' and exposes her body in order to transgress the limits of the classical body and the stereotypical pornographic-cinematic female body.

### 5.1.iii Strip Speak

Between 1984 and 1986, Annie Sprinkle joined the U.S. burlesque circuit to perform strip shows. In the early 1980s, female porn stars featured frequently on the American burlesque scene.<sup>38</sup> Sprinkle's version of the burlesque art of stripping evolved using storytelling skills that she had learned whilst doing radio shows with Fluxus artist Willem de Ridder in Italy.

In her *Strip Speak* shows, Sprinkle would improvise stories about sexual encounters and encourage the audience members to participate and masturbate. Touching and open masturbation are taboo in the conventional strip show, but Sprinkle reset the boundary between voyeuristic audience and normally mute stripper by conversing with the audience and inviting audience members to touch themselves and her, notably under her direction. Sprinkle (1997:81-2) describes the general structure of a show:

The house is packed. The lights grow dim. Slow, sexy music comes on. I am introduced...A pink spotlight picks me up as I glide onto the stage, dressed in an exquisite blue-green sequinned gown. My hair is piled glamorously on top of my head, and my extremities are adorned with an abundance of rhinestone jewellery. I pick up the microphone and purr, "Hello...so glad you could cummmmm this evening. I must say, the men here in ...(fill in name of town) are soooooo sexy. Do you like to French kiss? Good. I do hope you like to eat pussy here in...(town name here)." (Audience pants and screams "YEAH!").

Sprinkle goes on to describe how she then asks an audience member to assist her in unzipping her dress, under which she wears scant underwear. Meanwhile, she talks to the audience and provokes responses. She encourages one or two audience members to suck her nipples and then may fellate a man in the audience. If laws in the area exclude actual fellatio, she demonstrates on her "well hung blow up doll, *Harry*" (*ibid*). She then goes on to ask if anyone "eat[s] pussy" and quizzes the men as to their personal cunnilingus techniques, holding up the microphone for them to speak into or (depending on the state's laws) allowing them to demonstrate on her. Or, she talks erotically whilst massaging her

" Sprinkle was a full time student at the School of Visual Arts in New York. During semester breaks, she performed burlesque to pay her tuition fees, earning: "three to five thousand dollars a week, plus all the cash I could make posing for Polaroids with 'fans' after the show..." (Sprinkle 1997: 79).

clitoris. Finally, she states that she is "so horny. I'd sure love to get fucked. Can any of you guys help me?", at which point the show ends because "we're out of time" (*ibid*). Some of the strip-skits were themed, such as the Nurse Sprinkle skit (which is recycled in a later performance, to be discussed), the aerobics instructor and the water sports skit, in which audience members could shoot her with a squirt gun.

I will analyse Sprinkle's *Strip Speak* performances with reference to sex radical feminism, as such an analysis does not fall back onto a moral polemic, whereby certain pleasures are 'good' or 'bad', but considers the complex relations of power and privilege that inform dominant discourses of sex. O'Neill (2001:23) defines sex radical feminism as:

A radical feminism of opposition and subversion, making subversive use of the sexual order through a radicalism...sex radical feminism is made up of those individuals who identify with libertarian ethics and politics and others who situate sex within structures of power and privilege (Annie Sprinkle, Pat Califia).

Annie Sprinkle can also be considered a sex positive feminist, but her affiliations with sex radical feminism I think are more pertinent to her practice. That is, it is not merely the institution of sexual pleasure as a goal of feminism (a somewhat oblique aim) in the former feminism that interests her, but the subversion and transgression of fear and loathing of the sexual body and the political implications of this, particularly for women. Burlesque theatre lacks the credence of more 'legitimate' operations and so I will discuss the ways in which *Strip Speak* can be seen to subvert the structures and modes of viewing produced by 'legitimate' theatre texts as well as the strip show. I also critique ways in which *Strip Speak* fails to transgress the limitations of the conventional strip show and its structures of male voyeurism.

As in her film, *Deep Inside...*, Sprinkle used direct address in *Strip Speak* shows in order to shift the pornographic viewing frame. In conventional strip tease, the stripper is silent. Certainly, the personal, tactile interaction shared with the audience in *Strip Speak* is unconventional. Sprinkle also takes on something of a pedagogical role in the strip act which refigures the relationship between the voyeuristic audience and the stripper: Sprinkle acknowledges the audience's gaze and turns her gaze back upon them, indeed quizzing them on their 'sexual techniques' and establishing herself as the dominant

'expert'. Sprinkle's recitation of the strip show conventions of rude exposure coupled with her address to the audience shifts the body-object into the position of both speaking subject and object: both producer and product. The conflation of producer and product is echoed in the work of performance artists, particularly the Fluxus movement, who attempted to expose the commodification of art in capitalist structures by viewing the performer as the performed; artist as art(ifice).

Of note in the *Strip Speak* performances is the use of tactile interaction. In both the conventional strip show and the 'clean' logos-centred theatre, somatophobia prevails. The body must remain a closed system in the above examples, the body is an image which cannot touch or be touched if aesthetic distance is to be maintained. It is interesting, then, that Sprinkle allows her body to be touched in the *Strip Speak* performances for it is unclear whether this is gratifying to the audience or whether it is deeply subversive of social/sexual boundaries. This area of uncertainty is precisely what makes pornography and feminism difficult to reconcile. However, it is Sprinkle's theatricalisation or over-exposure of the conventional strip show that makes her work at this stage challenging to bounded concepts of art/porn and indeed feminism. Sprinkle's seemingly indiscriminate exposure of her flesh and performance of oral sex in the *Strip Speak* shows is difficult to recuperate without having actually seen the live performances. However, it is interesting that, like the medical theatre, the strip show has been constructed as a cultural space wherein the body-object is locked into a regime of scopic visibility. It is with reference to these structures that I understand the use of live oral sex in Sprinkle's performances. The body-object that is conventionally surveyed by a bevy of medical experts/sexual perverts holds sway over the viewer, extracting knowledge and the expenditure of cash and bodily fluids in the process. This expenditure is provoked by bringing the spender closer to the undifferentiated pleasures of the pre-symbolic, that is, by literal touch or tactile reflexivity, the taboo of the imaginary maternal body is revisited. Diamond (1997:151) says of the viewer/voyeur as psychoanalytic subject that: "seeing is always desiring; seeking for what cannot be found, the lost object, the lost breast, the plenitude of wholeness". The body-object of the stripper/whore can literally be bought by the masculine subject who has spending power. This mode of exchange exposes the circulation of money, words and women that sustains homosexual sociality. I recall Irigaray (1985b: 188) who states that:

The economy of desire—of exchange— is man's business. And that economy subjects women to a schism that is necessary to symbolic operations: red blood/semblance; body/value-invested envelope; matter/medium of exchange; reproductive nature/fabricated femininity.

In the development of the *Strip Speak* performances, Sprinkle anticipates her 'market value' and uses the stripper-persona to play the voyeuristic structure back against itself. The exposure of the explicit body in this instance also convolutes the 'schism' in the feminine subject of which Irigaray speaks: the decorated woman who enters at the beginning of the strip show is the same woman who exposes herself explicitly. Kaite (1995:60) says of the pornographic female body: "[ ]...the woman, in her bold genital expose, is a vicious yet scrutinised reminder (the clitoris can be located) of the other's loss in conjunction with the other's desire". This, for me, really begs the question of why the performance form of the strip show is considered an aberrant form, for the exhibitionism of the strip show, unlike the studied affectations of standard theatre, does not necessarily relieve castration anxiety in the recitation of logos. Kaite 1995: 74) states that:

Exhibitionism unsettles because it threatens to expose the duplicity inherent in every subject, and every object— to reveal the subject's dependence for definition upon the image/screen and his/her capacity for being at the same time in the picture, and the point of light for another subject.

Sprinkle's exhibitionism is unsettling because she refuses the culture of shame that affects profoundly female phenomenological experience. For example, in the *Strip Speak* shows, if she was menstruating, she would let her tampon string hang out of her vagina rather than concealing it as is the norm for strippers. Menstruation is widely inscribed as a dirty process (Houppert 1999) and certainly one that destroys the imagistic female body (*cf* Orlan's *Documentary Study*). In later performances, Sprinkle uses menstrual blood as a component of erotic ritual, but suffice to say, it was unconventional for the stripper to expose 'evidence' of bodily processes as Sprinkle did in the *Strip Speak* shows as the secret(e)s of the normally veiled female genitalia are on public display.

I do not consider the quintessential 'strip show' as good or bad for women, and I certainly do not want to ignore the struggles that women in the sex industry endure. I am

not attempting to analyse the (American) sex industry, but am tracing the modes of subversion and transgression that Annie Sprinkle undertakes. I am aware, too, that Sprinkle does not control the moment of visibility and that this is a risk that is shared by feminist performance artists who display the explicit body in their work. There is a risk in exposing flesh that the abject body merely reinforces dualistic thinking on the proper and the abject. It can be considered that Sprinkle's sex radicalism and her inversion of the pejorative 'whore' may reinforce the virgin/whore dichotomy by indicating that in order to be sexually explorative, women have no option but to identify with the whore persona. However, this is not so much Sprinkle's advocacy as it is an indication of the limited 'sexual categories' available for women to identify with within patriarchal cultures. Sprinkle does not prescribe prostitution, pornography or stripping as the only discourses of sexuality available. These are genres and social spaces wherein the circulation of the body-commodity is visible and where Sprinkle began her rigorous inquiry into the medium of sex.

The *Strip Speak* performances do not challenge explicitly circuits of masculine exchange but, ironically enough, the money that Sprinkle earned from these enabled her to move into producing performance art. Sprinkle's contemporary performance, unlike her work in the sex industry, is not merely subversive but moves into the transgressive in that she shifts the reading of the pornographic body by framing it as art. This shift provokes a panic as the (imaginary) borderlines between art and pornography (high/low, tasteful/tasteless, object/abject) are contradicted.

## **5.2 Transgression: Crossing the porn/art divide**

In section 5.2, I discuss Sprinkle's transition from sex worker to performance artist, and the performative de- construction of identity that is performed in her first solo show, *Post Porn Modernist* (1989-1996). For Jarvinau (in O'Neill 2001:88) "[prostitution milieux are... male subcultures with women playing secondary roles to clients and pimps". As Sprinkle moved into performance art, she became highly critical of the power structures within pornography and prostitution. Dutch Fluxus artist, Willem de Ridder, had introduced Sprinkle to the works of 1960's performance artists such as Carolee

Schneemann, Yoko Ono and Cosi Fanney Tuti. These artists had used the explicit body in order to interrogate sex and sexuality, but under the rubric of conceptual art. Although, as I have said, there are connections to be made between pornography and art, performance art is a form that has enabled female artists in particular to interrogate the construction of bodies and identity without appeal to the aesthetic standards or styles of masculinist forms of representation (including the classical dramatic and pornographic genres). Of course, theatre has long had connections with sexual vice and prostitution, linked again to the fear of female sexuality. Fuchs (1989:55) states that:

Both women's bodies and the theatre have traditionally been sites of prohibition, subject to 'prophylactic' separations of the clean from the dirty. Indeed, distaste for the theatre has often been couched in terms of fear of the female body. ..theatrophobes, from the Romans, to Prynne, to Rousseau, to Nietzsche, all attack theatrical performance itself...as inherently lewd and 'feminine'.

'Theatre' in this sense is separated from the standards of the theatrical canon. 'Theatrophobia' is linked particularly to the 'lowly' bodily forms of, for example, pagan ritual, carnival and latterly 'primitive' dance and burlesque. The creation of the modern bourgeois theatre was premised largely upon the construction of the theatre as a social space of manners and decorum, as Fuchs (*ibid*) states: "...decisively severed from the market of sexual liason, and converted into a systematically scoured and idealised space of consciousness. The eighteenth century theatre demanded a sublimated public body without smells, without coarse laughter, without organs". This sublimated public body disavows the abject (fluids, disorganisation, process) as a concession to politeness. The sometimes violent, orgiastic or scatological performances that characterise performance art (for example, the performances of the Viennese Aktionists or the body art of Ron Athey and Franko B; see Vergine (2000)) can be seen as a reaction against art and theatre that do not challenge aesthetic sensibilities and dominant perceptions of the body. Moreover, the performance of the abject body serves to return the viewer to the site/sight of the body in

Schneemann, Ono and Fanney Tuti are considered to be groundbreaking feminist performance artists in their own right. American artist Carolee Schneemann's best known formative performances are *Eye-Body* (1963) and *Meat Joy* (1964). In the former, she created an installation in her loft apartment and covered her body with painted markings, plastic and organic materials. In the latter, she and participants rolled about in an orgiastic ritual in raw meat. In Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* (1964), the Japanese-American artist knelt dressed in a traditional kimono whilst the audience used a pair of scissors placed next to her to cut off her garment. Cosi Fanney Tuti exhibited a plexiglass box full of used tampons in an English art gallery (1976).

order to confront that which is unspeakable and obscene, that which is lost in the formation of a closed and proper speaking subject.

Fuchs (1989) describes the body of post 1980s feminist performance art as typically 'obscene', whilst Rebecca Schneider (1997) uses the term 'explicit' to describe the strategic use of abjection in performance. I argue that the emergence of obscenity and the explicit in contemporary performance art is strongly underpinned by feminist discourse in particular in terms of feminism's attempts to expose and deconstruct the fears and fantasies of dominant phallogocentric culture. As has been posited, the maternal body, at least within the western Oedipal schema, is constructed as the primary other, and it is this (obscene) other that confronts the audience in feminist performance art. Notably, the immediacy of performance can be disarming to an audience raised on television and print media, a cultural milieu of cut and paste and high-gloss editing that is premised upon the very selling power of the seductive image.

The explicit body in feminist performance art threatens to destroy the boundaries between art and pornography because *inter alia* the aesthetic/pornographic/medical framework for recuperating the female body is rendered conditional (and bound to repressive power relations). Schneider (1997:20) points out that:

...historically, the demarcation between art and porn has not been concerned with the explicit sexual body itself, but rather with its agency, which is to say who gets to make explicit where and for whom. More directed toward the control of the frame around the explicit gendered body than the presentation of the body itself... the issue of distinction and control concerned who, or what interest group, was allowed to author or frame and ultimately explicate the terrain of the body (emphasis in original).

The point that I wish to make is that, particularly in the discourses of art, medicine and pornography, fixated as they are upon the body, the object under scrutiny is spoken about or for. It is assumed that pornographos, writing about prostitutes, is the prerogative of the scientifically distanced observer. Such authority is also assumed by the fraternity of medical experts who sublimate the 'patient' body beneath a lexicon of symptoms and cures, effectively denying the medical subject an alternative interpretation of their dis/ease.

Sprinkle's living room where they proceeded to remove their glamorous porn costumes whilst conversing and changing into street clothing (Sprinkle 2001:9). The stripping off within the mimetic framework of the 'everyday' served to obscure the structuring division between the negative stereotype of public woman (whore) and the 'good' private domestic female. The public/private woman are conjoined in the dialectical image which in turn begs the question of where obscenity is located— it cannot be in the body but must be discursively produced, that is, a matter of framing rather than content. Williams (1989:250) comments on *Deep Inside Porn Stars* that:

Borrowing the time-honoured rhetoric of hard-core's quest for secrets, for taking viewers 'deep inside' to the 'wonders of the unseen world', [Sprinkle et al] have also turned this rhetoric around, posing their female selves as the different 'explorers' of human desires who 'know' that realm as well as the entrepreneurs. And since women are included in this address and the knowledge offered is not single but varied, more questions are generated.

The allusion to depth in the show's title plays upon the pornographic trope of physical penetration as well as a modernist preoccupation with psychic interiority. However, the use of the dialectical image shows that I am one thing and another, porn star and 'ordinary' woman. The dialectical image shows that the appearance of an identity is constituted in the constant mimetic crossing over between one thing and another, and that this relation is not discrete.

### 5.2.ii The Prometheus Project

The first time that Sprinkle bridged the gap between the sex and art industries in a solo capacity was in *The Prometheus Project*, a performance project coordinated by Richard Schechner. Schechner, head of performance studies at New York University, invited Sprinkle to participate in the performance project after he had brought one of his classes to watch a late night performance at Show World, a downtown New York burlesque theatre. The class was aimed at addressing the topic of illicit theatre or, as Sprinkle (1997:95) describes it "...theatre that wasn't theatre". The class watched the *Nurse Sprinkle Sex*

theatres" (Fuchs 1989:38). These venues "specialise in performance art, and their performers easily combine fields- theatre and dance, dance and art, art and video, etc" (*ibid*).

*Education Class* act, one of her *Strip Speak* skits. Subsequently, Schechner asked Sprinkle to perform in *The Prometheus Project* at the prestigious Performing Garage, a performance space that he had established during the veritable eruption of avant garde theatre in the 1960s and '70s. Schechner's (academic) fascination with Annie Sprinkle's work (particularly the *strip speak* style) stems from his view that: "[a]t each increment of sexual opportunity, Sprinkle interviews the spectator asking him to describe what he sees, or how he feels. This automatically distances the action from its own sexual possibilities— making it anti-porn or a send up of porn" (Schechner in Sprinkle 2001: 9). To me, Schechner's view seems somewhat staid. It is Sprinkle's negotiation of shifting identities and power structures as she moves between the worlds of sleaze and 'legit' theatre that makes her work difficult to pin down as porn or theatre (a complexity that is also apparent in the work of Orlan). It is therefore a misnomer to cite *Strip Speak* as "anti-porn". Whatever Schechner's reading of *Strip Speak*, *The Prometheus Project* secured to some extent recognition for Sprinkle as a performance artist in her own right.

*The Prometheus Project* "was about apocalypse" (Fuchs 1989:42). The performance's central image was "the link between Promethean fire and the destruction of Hiroshima" (*ibid*), which was in turn linked to the violent repression of female sexuality.<sup>42</sup> Sprinkle performed her *Nurse Sprinkle Sex Education* skit, based upon *Strip Speak* performances. The performance consisted of four scenes in the second episode of the production. Four onstage masturbators in trenchcoats, hands in pockets, framed Sprinkle's show-within-a-show. These stereotyped voyeurs stood in for the burlesque audience, but also parodied the voyeuristic structure of conventional theatre audiences. The theatre audience is introduced to Nurse Sprinkle, dressed in a school-nurse uniform, who conducts a "show and tell" sex education class, asking the audience to repeat words like 'vagina' after her as she strips. She invited audience members to touch her nipples, put their heads between her breasts, and describe the feeling. Audience members were also invited to shine a flashlight at her genitals and/or examine them with a magnifying glass, describing their texture and colour. The onstage masturbators were not asked to touch Sprinkle's body, but the theatre audience were encouraged to touch and feel her body for educational

<sup>42</sup> It is noted that in *The Prometheus Project* Schechner (as director) attempted to forge a link between nuclear aggression and the oppression of female sexuality. Part of the theme of Prometheus-Hiroshima was developed out of the myth of Io, the priestess raped by Zeus and then turned into a cow, fated to wander the globe being chased by stinging gadflies sent by jealous Hera. At the end of her act, Sprinkle donned a cow

purposes, which plays upon that tired old standard of modern western sex education in the form of the School Nurse.

The licence to touch and describe publicly another's skin, indeed the skin of the other-other woman, the prostitute, brings into play a complex array of social transgressions. The inspection of Sprinkle's genitalia seems to have been an invitation to look into 'Pandora's box' as it were for it was generally difficult for female audience members to overcome an identificatory repulsion and take up the invitation (Fuchs 1989:43) to look at the forbidden and taboo. [Heterosexual] male audience members may enter the fray of 'the gaze' with some semblance of 'knowledge' though not, I am sure, without some embarrassment as described in Fuchs (1989:43) "...the rhapsodic male responses to Sprinkle's breasts were 'a macho pose of knowledgeableability' layered over a 'general embarrassment'". Part of the difficulty for women, I would think, in looking at their or another woman's genitalia is that female genitalia within the dominant imaginary (and I stress *dominant*, as it is not the *only* imaginary possible) have no referent other than as the not-phallus. That is, the female sex remains a site, a space, that is reproduced negatively by phallogocentric discourse so that it becomes a learnt attitude of women to be repulsed by their genitalia and to be ashamed and silent about their bodily processes. Irigaray (1985b:25) formulates this lack of bodily and sexual knowledge between women in the following:

Woman in the sexual imaginary is only more or less an obliging prop for the enactment of men's fantasies. That she may find pleasure there in that role, by proxy, is possible, even certain. But such pleasure is above all a masochistic prostitution of her body to a desire that is not her own, and it leaves her in a state of dependency upon man.

In her *Nurse Sprinkle... skit*, Sprinkle challenges the privileged western discourse of *scientia sexualis* by removing technical language, based upon judgement and prescription from the realm of 'experts' and indeed soliciting descriptive responses from the audience. Orlan (in Kauffman 1998:70) states that: "[t]he culture of experts has the technical lingo, but it comprehends nothing, it tells us nothing". Sprinkle's unashamed carnal knowledge

mask and introduced the *Io* sequence, in which young women ran back and forth "stopping to testify to their personal experiences of sexual abuse" (Fuchs 1989:44)

reverses the dependence upon expert (masculinist) discourses to know the body. By taking on the role of the insatiable whore, Sprinkle mimics the construction of the stereotypically excessive and insatiable female body and claims that 'excess' as pleasurable, lucrative and empowering.

It is in *The Prometheus Project* that Sprinkle began to incorporate multimedia into her performances. Amongst other visuals, Sprinkle had 'pornstistics' slides projected. These slides demonstrated her earning capacity in the sex industry compared to the weekly income of the average American woman (then US\$243 to Sprinkle's US\$4000). In one slide the Empire State building is juxtaposed with an enormous phallus representing "the total number of feet of cock sucked" in her career (1475ft, by her calculations, the exact height of the Empire State (Sprinkle 1997:96)). The quantification of her exploits parodies legitimate statistical models and simultaneously comments upon the construction of patriarchal institutions upon the negated material base of female bodies (*cf* Orlan's *MesuRAGES*). The dialectical image functions here too, as: "the 'good' female subjectivity of the ordered libido and separated boundaries (the woman of autonomy, authority, and authorship) slides into the 'bad' woman of pornographic male fantasy (the woman of infinite compliance, who is really, secretly, a whore)" (Fuchs 1989:51). The dual image of the 'good' and 'bad' woman serves to show up sexual manners and mores for their inherent bigotry and exposes the network of symbolic exchange (money, women or words) whereby women are relegated to limited categories of legitimacy and violently punished for transgression (here, the connection with nuclear destruction and female sexuality can be seen). The dialectical image, then, is tasteless because it secretes from both sides of binary structures the secrets of the image and of gendered social constructs.

### ***5.3 Post Porn Modernist***

It was after her initial foray into the formal New York 'art world' that Sprinkle developed the transgressive *Post Porn Modernist* performances, which I will contextualise and discuss in the following section.

#### 4.3.i Shifting perspectives: sex, art and Aids

The development of Sprinkle's performance career during the 1980s was affected profoundly by the identification of Aids, which rocked the sex industry and resulted in a massive conservative backlash. ' When her lover tested positive for HIV, Sprinkle (1997:153) states that, to minimise the risk of her being infected, she "[was] forced to be more creative and experimental, to expand our concept of sex". Sprinkle researched tantra, Taoist and Native American sexual techniques and rituals and engaged in breathing and eye-gazing rituals. Sprinkle's concept of sex thus shifted radically from being perceived primarily as a genitalised act to be interpreted as circulating or shared energy- which is really antithetical to the pornographic paradigm. From this research, conjoined with her experiences in the sex industry, Sprinkle has developed an eccentric discourse that conjoins a hybrid *scientia sexualis* and New Age *ars erotica*. The expansion of Sprinkle's concept of sex into a broader pansexuality was assuredly precipitated by Aids as well as her induction into a performance art paradigm. It seems that broadly Aids is an epidemic that calls for a rethinking of identity, bodies and their pleasures from the 'inside out'. Here I recall Artaud's notion of theatre as a plague (Artaud 1970, Spreen 2003) that must change society internally. Artaud (1970) reformulated the plague as a positive force with poetic capabilities, in the manner of Kristevan abjection that promises absolute difference and the admission of new modes of signification that will change the dominant symbolic. Sprinkle's approach to sexuality in the wake of Aids is echoed by Irigaray (1993:65): "Developing your sexuality (vis a vis Aids) doesn't involve reproducing (one more) child but rather transforming your sexual energy with a view to a pleasurable and fertile cohabitation with others". Unlike Biblical and Freudian tradition, that subscribe to a definition of sex and sexuality as a reproductive mechanism centring around the crucial intervention of the phallus, both Irigaray and Sprinkle emphasise heterogenous pleasure.

It was after her initial foray into the formal New York 'art world' that Sprinkle developed the transgressive *Post Porn Modernist* performances, which I will contextualise and discuss in the following section. In her performance of the whore persona, Sprinkle subverts phallic [spending] power and in her more recent incarnations as a sex goddess,

<sup>43</sup> Sprinkle (1997:152) describes her experience of the onset of the HIV/Aids pandemic: "Life was a sex cabaret. Then suddenly... friends and lovers were getting horribly sick and dying. These weren't just acquaintances, but my best friends. At first it was a great mystery. Then the cause of death was discovered to be "gay cancer", then something called GRID..., then Aids".

she negates the ubiquity of phallic desire. The development of Sprinkle's performance art practice has been influenced profoundly by the negotiation of pleasure in a society that she describes repeatedly as 'pleasure negative' (Sprinkle 1997, 2001) (c/"Orlan's society of merchants and mothers). Indeed, as Sprinkle's 'post-porn' artistic practice developed, her politics became more overt.

As a self-described multimedia whore in the eponymous biopic (1997), Sprinkle has exploited media hype for publicity for her shows as well as to disseminate her political messages, namely: "A call to decriminalise and destigmatise sex work, to promote sex-positive attitudes, and encourage more and better sex education" (Sprinkle 1997:37). Shifting from film to live performance, Sprinkle moves between the identities of whore, performance artist and 'pleasure activist'. Like Orlan's *MesuRages*, public interventions such as *The Liberty Love Boat* (1995)<sup>44</sup> cruise to New York's Statue of Liberty transgress the boundaries of containment assigned to 'theatre' in order to theatricalise public space. Given that Sprinkle takes a political standpoint, it cannot be expected that her politics speaks for a universal 'other': the work of any one performance artist or political activist cannot speak for all localised experiences and structures of race, class and sexuality. To do so would be to assume an authority that reinscribes the role of the universal intellectual premised by a monologic (phallic) imaginary. Sprinkle's shifting perspectives on the explicit body, representation and sexuality are reflected in the development of her first solo performance, *Post Porn Modernist*. I will consider how *Post Pom Modernist* exceeds the limits of theatrical representation and in so-doing radically alters the framework of viewing the female body. I also discuss how race and gender have been imbricated in scientific and aesthetic frameworks, so that the explicit white, female body has been discursively produced as analogous with the 'savage' hypersexualised black female body.

### 5.3.ii. After Olympia, Post Porn Modernist

When Manet's *Olympia* was exhibited in 1865, it excited a scandal in the academy. The reclining, naked courtesan in the painting looked directly out at the viewer, not attempting

*The Liberty Love Boat* was organised by Sprinkle in conjunction with Performance Space 122. Artists and sex workers were invited to join in a Columbus Day cruise to the Statue of Liberty "to celebrate Freedom of Creative Sexual Expression" (Sprinkle 2001:40). Most participants arrived wearing theatrical regalia. Sprinkle herself sported a sequined mermaid's tail. Despite police harassment, the group took turns to perform various speeches, actions or rituals.

to cover her nakedness with shy or coy gestures. The black female servant proffering flowers in the background and the pet black cat at Olympia's feet shadowed the naked white body as a symbol of savage and bestial female sexuality. During the time that the painting was first exhibited, there was no frame of reference for reading Olympia's nudity nor in fact her designation as a courtesan: "Olympia in her nakedness failed to support the representation of the whore as lower class/underclass, polluted, decadent and decaying..." (O'Neill 2001:125-6). *Olympia* functions as a compelling dialectical image of the white, female, prostitutional body as at once a self-contained image of decorum and disgrace. Whilst the contents of the painting subverted the rules of canonical representation, and Olympia's gaze is certainly not averted in a show of shameful modesty, the ubiquity of the white, female nude available as aesthetic object remained intact. Schneider (1997:27) states that: "the passive terrain of the scopic field did not herself revolt but was appropriated by an artist whose agency was not in question".

The specific issue of racialised representations of female nudity is provoked by the placement of a black female servant in the painting. The black servant woman's presentation of a bouquet of white, invaginated orchids and her intent gaze directed at Olympia can be seen as offering the body of the white woman to the viewer's gaze and desire: the black female body is simultaneously de- and re-sexualised, at once obedient servant and excessive and bestial sub-human. The black woman looks sideways, in contrast to Olympia's direct gaze. There is a crush of variance in the representation of race, gender and class in the painting, especially in the different standards assumed for the black and white female bodies:

White women are ambivalent signs, split between the binaried poles of potential virgin and potential fallen whore, whereas black women historically have been socially decided...never virginal, never pure, but signifying...the always already fallen site of the primitive (ibid).

Olympia's self-containment is given to-be-seen in contrast to the impossible, dark, vanishing point of the 'savage' black female body, the site of absolute difference (between dark and light, containment and savagery) thus giving a place or context to the white sexualised female body of Olympia against which to stage defiance, defiance that nevertheless remains entrenched within masculinist cultural structures. Following this

reading of Manet's *Olympia*, I will deconstruct *Post Porn Modernist* in order to consider the ways in which Sprinkle's narrative of self-construction and the display of her explicit body reframes the frame of representation assumed by phallogocentric representational structures. I will discuss the ways in which the explicit white female body is ghosted by the black female body, a body that is always already marked as savage within the racialised western imaginary.

### 5.3.iii Post porn modernism

Post-porn modernism is a genre that incorporates sexually explicit material in its aesthetic in order to politicise and debunk exclusive categories between art and pornography. Post porn modernism, a term coined by the Dutch artist Wimp van Kempen (Sprinkle 1997), is anti-formalist and eclectic, using interdisciplinary techniques and multimedia. Modernism had long been preoccupied with the iconoclastic potential of low-art forms such as pornography as a form of anti-art that would undermine bourgeois norms. *Post Porn Modernist*, as shall be seen, is more properly a resistant postmodern performance (Auslander 1997) because it does not displace theatrical performance so much as interrogate the form by using critical strategies of masquerade, parody and the carnivalesque. The resistant postmodern feminist subject is also represented in the *Post Porn Modernist* performances, a subject who self reflexively deconstructs herself whilst resisting identification with hegemonic structures.

*Post Porn Modernist* was first produced by poet Emilio Cubeiro, who helped Sprinkle organise material from previous vignettes into a skeleton script and full-length solo performance. During the years of the show's run (1989-1996), it went through several reincarnations under the direction of Willem de Ridder (ca 1990) and Barbara Carrellas (1996) respectively. The first performance took place at the Harmony Theatre in New York and then moved on to venues in the United States, Canada, Europe and Australia between 1989-1996. In the show, Sprinkle performed a series of monologues about her transformation from shy and prudish Ellen Steinberg to glamorous and exciting Annie Sprinkle. The performance used multimedia, incorporating live performance, slides, soundtrack and numerous costumes, fetish objects and sex-aides.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>45</sup> The properties for *Post Porn Modernist* are housed in the Robert J. Shiffler Foundation archives.

As in her early porn film, *Deep Inside Annie Sprinkle*, the *Post Porn Modernist* performances began with Sprinkle welcoming the audience into her 'home'. Following the introduction, Sprinkle describes how "I didn't like being Ellen Steinberg very much, so I simply invented Annie Sprinkle" (Sprinkle 1994: unpaginated). Whereas Ellen Steinberg appears in the projected slides as a plain young girl, Annie Sprinkle is represented as an unabashed exhibitionist with teased hair, makeup, jewellery and flashy clothing. Ellen-the-virgin and Annie-the-whore are the same person—the figures of virgin and whore slide into one another in a dialectical construction embodied by the live Sprinkle on stage. The transition from Ellen to Annie, virgin to whore, is shown in the slide images to be an exoteric (Diamond 1997) process of masquerade whereby identity is re-marked upon the body. History (I should say Herstory in this instance) is temporalised and allows the audience to read the construction of subjectivity against the grain of dominant grand historical narratives.

After the Ellen/Annie sequence, Sprinkle describes her career in the sex industry as prostitute, pinup model and stripper. Her humorous anecdotes, accompanied by 'pornstistics' slides make it apparent that she was able to exploit the sex industry rather more than she was exploited, particularly in comparison to the exploitative dominant sexual economy that does not pay women for domestic labour (including childbirth, childcare and housework).<sup>46</sup> The use of various photographic slides of former clients and accompanying descriptions by Sprinkle of their sexual preferences inverts the conventional direction of exploitation in prostitution: Sprinkle views her role as assisting the client in performing sexuality whereby she is instrumental in the negotiation of finance and fantasies rather than a site of depraved corporeality. Clearly this is not the case for all prostitutes who may face serious risk and abuse. However, it is significant that Sprinkle reverses the social construction of the whore-body as a site of dysfunctional sexuality/femininity by citing a vocational version of prostitution and by revealing her (male) clients to be at great variance to normative heterosexual masculinities in their own right. The reversal of the normatively obscured power relations between prostitute and

Irigaray (1986: 13) states: *[o]ur societies presuppose that the mother should nurture the child without payment, before and after birth, and that she should continue to nurture both man and society. This traditional role paralyses male society too, and allows us to go on destroying life's natural resources.*

client does not remove Sprinkle from masculinist circuits of exchange but does challenge the negative construction of 'the whore' within that system.

#### 5.3.iv The limits of taste in *Post Porn Modernist*

It is a strategy of feminist performance artists to relocate subjectivity in the particular-personal, heterogenous body. In *Post Porn Modernist*, Sprinkle constantly plays off the particular, visceral body against aesthetic and scientific discourses and, as I will discuss, the 'savage' body of racial discourse. I argue that Sprinkle is able to transgress dominant modes of representation most effectively in *Post Porn Modernist* in the performance of bodily abjection in episodes dubbed *100 Blow Jobs*, *Public Cervix Announcement*, *Bosom Ballet* and *The Sex Magic Masturbation Ritual* respectively. These episodes establish contradiction in Sprinkle's praxis, as she is both image-maker *and* image-breaker, oscillating between positions of subject, object and abject.

After talking through a series of slides from the "Transformation Salon"; images of fourteen women photographed by Sprinkle before-and-after being made up as pin-up personae (see Sprinkle 1997, Vergine 2000), Sprinkle performs the *100 Blow Jobs* scene. She introduced this scene by stating: "Of course there were disadvantages to working in the sex industry. It wasn't always easy being a sexually promiscuous woman in this society" (Sprinkle 1994: unpaginated). Then, using a prop that was made up of a row of dildos nailed to a board, and backed by a track of pre-recorded misogynistic verbal abuse, Sprinkle sucked vigorously on the dildos, fellating them until she choked and sometimes vomited. She then walked over to the vanity table onstage and brushed her teeth, quipping: "I had sex with 3500 people and only 100 times were bad. Not a bad average, considering we live in a society as violent and sex negative as ours is today. That kind of stuff doesn't just happen to sex workers but to all kinds of women, and men too" (Sprinkle 1994, unpaginated). What interests me here is the staging of the explicit body in conjunction with verbal commentary. The commentary must seem almost banal in comparison to the image and sounds of mock-fellatio, choking and vomit (Sprinkle wears a wireless head set microphone throughout the performance, thus the sound of sucking and vomiting is amplified). Interestingly enough, abuse is imaged by Sprinkle fellating artificial phalluses. It must be considered why fellatio is such a compelling sign of degradation. The female mouth is of course a highly eroticised site and as such can be seen as a symbolic

displacement of the maternal genitalia. Tselon (2001:155) states that the female mouth has been variously eroticised in religious and secular discourses and that this is due to "...fear of the female voice, and its link to the fear of female flesh and desire". The *100 Blow Jobs* episode is violent and cathartic: the phalluses stand in as metonyms for the male body and moreover for repressive and violent masculine power. Sprinkle de-eroticises the mouth by gagging and vomiting up the abject contents of her stomach, in the process "releasing deep emotions from the gut" (Sprinkle 1997:165). The somatic release of emotions resonates with the ideology of modernist practitioners, particularly Artaud, who envisioned a theatre remade through cry and gesture, a theatre of cruelty whose excess would purge society of epistemic violence. Moreover the expulsion of abject fluids from the body transgresses the borders of subjecthood and undermines the supremacy of *logos*, temporarily destroying the image of the female body as object of desire. The comment that Sprinkle makes after she has cleaned her teeth in a sense restores *logos* but with the temporality of the subject whose bodily boundaries are unstable.

Following Kristeva's theory on subject formation (1984), it is through the primary contact between mouth and breast that we come to know the maternal body in infancy, a connection that is displaced by proper speech as we enter the symbolic. The mouth is thus a highly contested site of meaning and gender differentiation. As has been seen in Orlan's *interventions*, the highlighting and cutting of the lips is significant to her interrogation of the body-text. I argue that it is more effective for Sprinkle to use her mouth as the site of abuse because the mouth is not sexually specific (although, as has been made apparent, the mouth is a site of gender difference). This idea of the mouth and indeed of voice and speech is significant to the reading of Sprinkle's work and for understanding how she ties the erotic, the abject and the political together in her performances. The mouth is a site of distant and repressed connections to preverbal infancy whilst being highly regulated by the symbolic: although the mouth is common to the male and female body, the way in which the subject moves from an oral connection to the maternal body to the verbal functioning of the mouth is genderised. Tselon (2001:163) posits three models of (literal) female voice: the proper, the provocative and the mute. The proper female voice is the least conspicuous, it is "the polite, gentle, non challenging voice" (*ibid*) that characterises the lady of good manners and social graces. The provocative voice is "...daring speech which is manifested in erotic and sensual forms of feminine expression" (*ibid*), and can be found in, for example, the mythological sirens or the Biblical temptress Eve and in 'dirty talk'

and bad language. The mute voice is described by Tseelon (*ibid*) as emerging out of "...the limited repertoire of choices of voice available [to women]". Silence can resist imposed speech or be compliant with repressive norms: it is a complex and contrary form, it is "an exercise of power but also a charade of power" (*ibid*). Tseelon's model, I think, provides a way of interpreting Sprinkle's use of the explicit body, with specific reference to *100 Blow Jobs*, in conjunction with spoken language. Many performance artists deliberately exclude verbal text from their work (a prominent example is Franko B) in order to focus on 'the body', but for Sprinkle I think it is important that she use spoken text as a means of undermining the stereotype of the dumb sex-object that feminists decry in pornography. Thus, provocative voice functions in conjunction not with muteness per se but the body as the site that produces and fragments desire and thus speech.

Following the *100 Blow Jobs* was the *Bosom Ballet*, in which Sprinkle manipulated her sizable breasts to The Blue Danube Waltz. Naked from the waist up and wearing opera-length black gloves and a tutu, she performed the 'ballet' under a pink spotlight. Sprinkle upended the decorum of the classical ballet as she rolled, pinched and jiggled her breasts. Her large, soft body differs obviously from the petite balletic ideal whose movements defy gravity— gravity clearly evidences its pull on Sprinkle's dancing breasts.<sup>47</sup> The ballerina's 'savage' western counterpart, the stripper, is also upended by the explicit exposure and movement of the breasts: the conventions of the strip tease are disrupted by the overt distortion of the breasts as erotic signifiers, indeed the distorted breast is grotesque. That Sprinkle's skin is so very white is also significant, and is contrasted with the black gloves. The marble-white stillness of the classical white female body is recalled and then debased by the moving and morphing breasts. The image of the double breast also displaces the reified icon of the nursing Madonna, whose single-exposed (white) breast can be seen to function as a phallic mark (Kaite 1995) and a marker of racial purity. The image of large or distended, doubly-exposed breasts belongs conventionally to the photographic and drawn documentations of classical anthropology, particularly to depictions of the 'savage black female' and the almost always near-naked 'savage' dancing body. Thus, Sprinkle's mobile breasts are encoded with the threat of the savage body (and 'savage' maternal power) whilst she stands partially inside the scopic field of the classical white female ballerina.

<sup>47</sup> See Aalten (1997) for an analysis of classical ballet as an ethnic dance form that represents norms of western gender power differences.

After the *Bosom Ballet*, Sprinkle performs what has perhaps become the most notorious episode in *Post Porn Modernist*. This episode: *The Public Cervix Announcement*, is preceded by Sprinkle making innocuous small-talk with the audience whilst performing a warm water douche over the onstage toilet. Sprinkle (1997:165) describes her actions:

After I wipe and flush, I move to centre stage and sit in the armchair. Adopting the manner of a teacher, I present a chart of the female reproductive system, pointing out the ovaries, uterus, fallopian tubes and cervix...I open my legs, insert a metal speculum into my vaginal canal, and screw it open, joking: "Hmmm still so tight after all these years." I explain why I'm showing my cervix, then invite the members of the audience to come up and take a look with the aid of a flashlight.

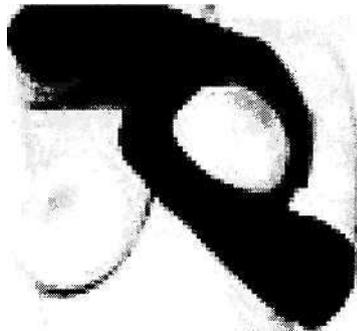


Fig 20: From *Bosom Ballet* ([www.google.co.za](http://www.google.co.za))

Schneider (1997:58) says of *Public Cervix Announcement*: "When Sprinkle lays literally at the edge of the stage and inserts a speculum into her vagina so that art-world spectators and porn fans alike can line up to catch a glimpse of her cervix, she one-ups holy precedence". The episode is unorthodox in several fundamental ways. Firstly, the use of a medical

speculum by a 'non-expert' transgresses the structures of exclusion and mystification that withhold medical knowledge and paraphernalia from the public domain. Also, the sight of the cervix is withheld from the pornographic frame whereby the object/orifice is a site of penetration that is otherwise an empty space- the cervix, in this instance and in rudimentary terms, is shown to be a thing and not just a place. Within this crush of competing referential frames, the visual frame is reworked, that is, the threshold of the stage has literally become the body into which the eye is drawn. The eye penetrates the vanishing point of Annie Sprinkle's cervix but the spectacle, in turn, specularises the viewer because the open body, like the orifice and the mouth, is always becoming. This endless becoming, like the fold, cannot be recuperated by a phallogocentric logos. This speaks to the fear of that which is beyond the scopical field or beyond the vanishing point of classical perspectivalism: after the body of the black female servant in Manet's *Olympia*, placed to draw the eye towards a vanishing point in the visual plane, Annie Sprinkle's cervix, endlessly receding into her own body. The metaphorical 'third eye' embedded in Sprinkle's body (and the bodies of women) presents for public view the site (sight) of imagined savagery which is the unfolding time of infinite space or difference.

It would be pertinent to remember that the construction of the white female body is premised upon the negation of colour and the 'savage' for the 'civilised'. The white female body as spectacle in the performance of *A Public Cervix Announcement* recalls the 'savage [d]' body of colour. Indeed, the elision between the (white) prostitute body and the assumed excesses of 'savage sexuality' is prevalent, *Olympia* being a case in point. If a black female performer had chosen to expose her cervix in a like manner the viewing frame would be contested by different racial and class imperatives. (In Chapter Six, I interrogate the construction of viewing frames for the female body of colour). My point is that genitalia are contested sites for gender, class and racial differentiation: a vagina and a cervix are not racially neutral insofar as they are embedded in particular bodies and tied to historical imperatives and discursive norms. For me, the exposure of that most taboo orifice in Sprinkle's performance really begs the question of where the white ('clean and proper') and black ('savage') body begins and ends.<sup>48</sup> The public transgression of the standards of bodily decorum and shame prescribed for white women I think also

I note that this is one possible reading of the explicit exposure of the female sex and that explicit displays of flesh may be seen to reinscribe the objectification, indeed the *genitalisation* of the female subject thus reiterating sexist and racist stereotypes.

historicises the discursive production of the 'clean and proper', read 'civilised', modern body, the 'dirty' sexual body being reinscribed and repressed in 'low' forms of popular culture such as pornography.

The episode that brings *Post Porn Modernist* to a close is entitled: *The Sex Magic Masturbation Ritual*, which Sprinkle (<http://www.anniesprinkle.org>) describes as "the most important and enlightening" performance that she has done. Drawing upon the figure of the sacred temple prostitute, Sprinkle anoints herself, if possible with menstrual blood, and after offering prayers for friends and community, proceeds to masturbate to amplified orgasm.<sup>49</sup> This particular episode, I think, blows the lid off a veritable Pandora's box of unspeakable female sexuality. Sprinkle moves easily from porn queen to goddess figure (her 'goddess name' is Anya) in the masturbation ritual, from the depraved to the transcendental, which brings us back to the dialectical image as revelatory of the social regulation of ambiguous and dualistic subject positions. Clearly this ritual is far removed from Sprinkle's formative years in pornography whereby onanism is realised as a political performance medium in the more recent performances rather than a means to an end in the former instances. The ritual is intended not for the exclusive gratification of an invisible voyeur, but as an act of communion, which of course upends Puritanism, inspiring senator Jesse Helms to denigrate *Post Porn Modernist* as "a sewer of depravity" (Oesland 1999:28). I am certain that opinions such as Helms's are a reaction to the bodily indecorum displayed by Sprinkle and other performance artists: the "privatised consumption of spectacle" (Arthurs 1999:143), that is, the pornographic body, is destroyed by the live, physical and I might add public experience "where all the senses of touch, smell and kinesics are involved" (*ibid*).

The voice also plays a central role in the ritual and in a sense reintegrates the fragmented body formerly displayed (mouth, breasts, genitalia/cervix). The amorphousness of the voice shatters the (coherent, unified) subject whilst remaking the body in the sense of the autarchic: here again there is a strong connection to be made with Artaud's notion of the body remade through cry and gesture. It is significant that the masturbation ritual does

Sprinkle cites ancient Mesopotamia, Greece, Egypt and Sumeria as cultures that celebrated the sacred prostitute who, being male or female, "devoted their lives to learning the art of sexual ecstasy...it was believed that the best time to connect with the Divine, to get visions and create miracles was when you were

nothing to allay the castration anxiety of the voyeur or for that matter the subject entrenched in a phallogocentric bias. In fact there is no visible proof in the manner of the 'money shot' that Sprinkle experiences pleasure or climaxes in the ritual. This I think speaks to the problem and the potential of the female body as a locus of language. The female body lacks proof of authority but it is this very 'lack' that reinscribes the potential for reinterpretation and heterogeneity. O'Neill (2001:69) states: "A theory of politics that cannot cope with contradiction, or with the irrational, or that tries to sanitise the erotic components of human life cannot visualise an end to domination". Thus, the transgression of categories of pornography/art, closed/explicit body and various discourses (medical, religious and pornographic) become a strategy for Sprinkle in the development of a symbolic economy that engages difference, in which one existing at the expense of another is no longer privileged.

#### **5.4 Life-art: Seven Years of Love as Art**

In conclusion to this chapter, I discuss briefly Sprinkle's current project which revolves around an experiment with monogamy with her partner, artist Elizabeth M. Stevens. The pair will "explore Love As Art for seven years" (<http://loveartlab.org>) Each year will be themed with the colour of a *chakra*, or energy centre, and an emotive focus.<sup>50</sup> The collaborative work has been influenced largely by Sprinkle's contact with performance artist Linda Montano. Montano was prolific in the 1970s and 80s as one of a number of performance artists who, as Goldberg (1998:23) states:

...retreated into the psyche, tending to perform solo, concentrating on singular gestures that were often painful to endure, and unnerving to watch. Invoking shamanism, cathartic therapy, ritual, and behavioural analysis, this kind of performance... provided artists with access to their own emotional histories and a tool for attacking taboos, whether sexual or social.

What also distinguished these performance artists from others was the tendency to interrogate the boundary between the elevated state of theatrical performance and the

Between 2004 to 2011, the colours and themes to be explored are planned as: red:security, orange:sexuality, yellow:courage, green:love, blue:communication, purple:bliss, white:union.

performative nature of everyday activities. Sprinkle has clearly inherited from the iconoclastic political consciousness of these artists, particularly during her time in residence at Montano's Life/Art Institute in New York in 1987.<sup>51</sup> Montano's extended performances, most notably in which she lived for a year attached by a rope to another artist and for seven years focusing each year upon a particular chakra and wearing only clothing in that chakra's colour, motivated Sprinkle's collaboration with Stevens (*cf.* Marina Abramovic and Ulay). Sprinkle and Steven's project echoes Montano's seven year performance but is more overtly political. The collaboration also reflects Sprinkle's more recent commitment to lesbian culture. Their annual colour-themed marriage ceremony is a public celebration of ghettoised same-sex partnerships. Amongst Sprinkle and Stevens's collaborative performances is a bed installation in various galleries. Viewers are invited to cuddle between them. The pair have also workshopped multimedia performances (on the subject of sex) that have included footage of Sprinkle's breast biopsy following her diagnosis with breast cancer in 2005. In her cancer treatments, the surgical space, Sprinkle and medical personnel are transformed with carnivalesque costumes and props.

Although I will not discuss it here, Sprinkle's chemotherapy treatments-as-performance and the use of surgical footage in performances resonates with the work of Orlan in terms of the use of life as a recuperable event. There is also a connection to be made here between the agency exhibited by these artists in their transgression of medical and aesthetic discourses through the opening and closing of the body. The use of multimedia in Sprinkle's performance, like Orlan's documentation of the surgical process, serves to historicise identity, and sexuality, within a matrix of intersubjective relations and power structures.

## **Conclusion**

Sprinkle's sexuality (inseparable from her body) has been re-enacted in a plethora of personae and relations. Sex, which in the light of Sprinkle's views on the subject does not refer only to a genitalised act, has been a tool whereby Sprinkle has been able to reinvent

<sup>51</sup> During the 1987 residence or 'Saint Camp', each day was structured around ascetic habits and a focus upon a particular chakra. Each night of the camp, residents 'performed' from the focal chakra. Residents of Montano's Art/Life Institute ...[generally do] what I do all year- keep a monastic schedule, eat rice and beans, live frugally (a little toilet paper, lights off, cold water baths etc.) so that structure gets substituted for worldly success, dreaming for TV, walking for cars, and awareness for entertainment (Montano 1989:94).

herself and, by casting off and taking on different performative personae, she has attempted to expose the power relations that circumscribe heterocentric, phallogocentric desire. Desire and language are ubiquitous, and so it can be seen that, by manipulating the body between object and subject of desire, Sprinkle in effect disrupts the skin of a 'proper' female identity and the paternal authority of the symbolic itself. By opening up and exposing her sexually specific bodily interiors, Sprinkle pushes at the limits of representation. However, it is the artifice established in the performance and pornographic styles that enable her to produce a critical aesthetic and to reinscribe the performance space with her morphology. In keeping with the doubling or contradiction that marks Orlan's praxis, Sprinkle's morphology is at once sexually specific but not limited to the overdetermined category 'female'; Sprinkle's skin is a form of intelligence that is also a mutable medium.

Whilst I do not find any conclusive interpretation of Sprinkle's practice, and since she is clearly working against the grain of canonical criticism, the connection between the whore-body and the savage-body remains compelling. This analogy between the whore-body and the savage/d female body 'of colour' bespeaks a link between the repression of female bodies, desire and language in a western paradigm and the discursive annihilation of the female body/voice/sexuality in the Imperial project. This is a connection that leads me into Chapter Six and the female body 'at home', as it were, in South Africa, and the realisation that the mechanisms of sexual and racial domination function together.

Figs 21,22: *Strip Speak*; Sprinkle demonstrates on Harry the blow-up doll (Les Brany)



Fig. 23 *Strip Speak* - tampon string (Les Brany)



Fig. 24 Post Porn Modernist: Pornstistics (Annie Sprinkle)

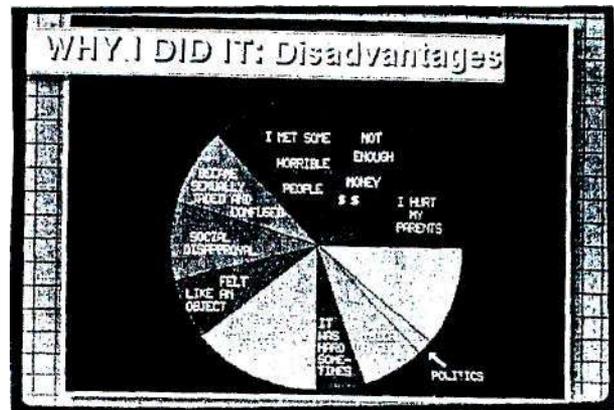
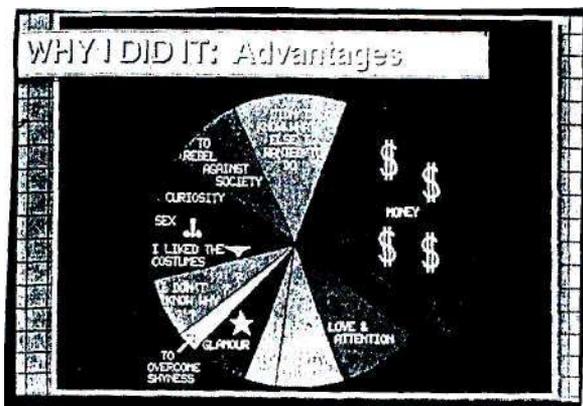
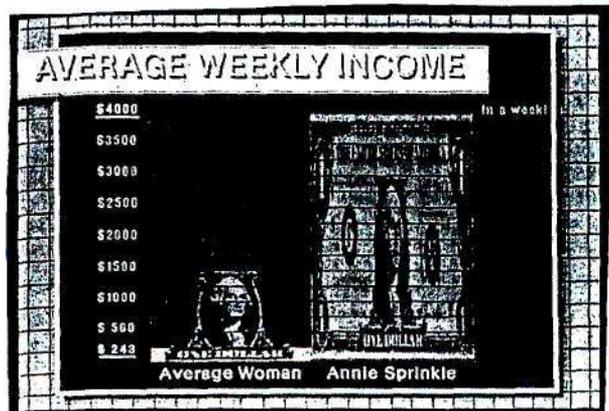
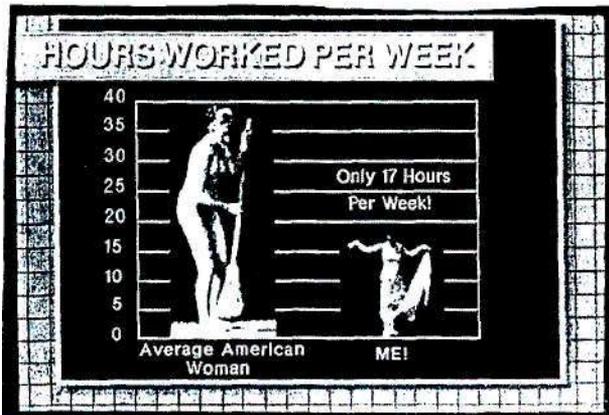
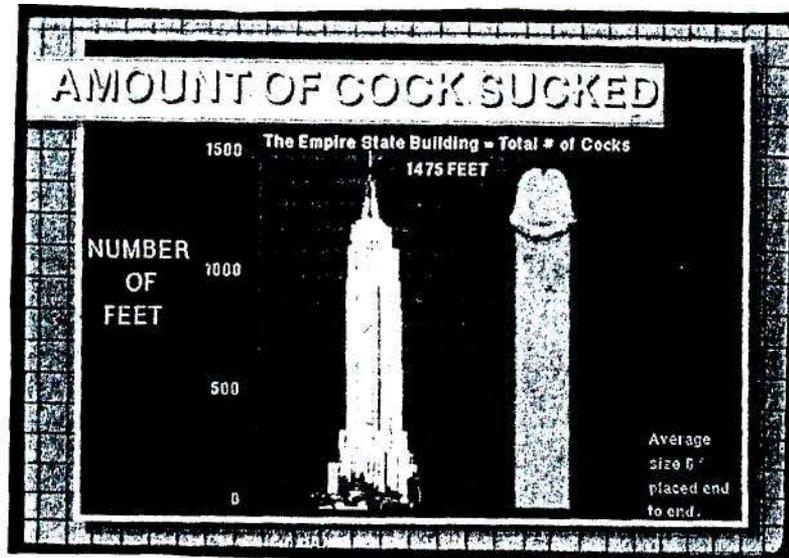
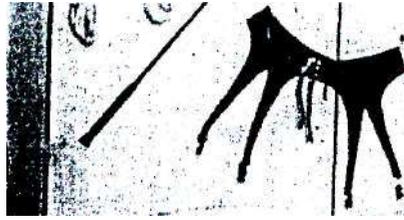


Fig. 25 *Post Porn Modernist: Transformation Salon of Linda Montano (Annie Sprinkle)*



Fig. 26 *Post Porn Modernist: 100 Blow Jobs* (Alan Pogue)



v :>

- - \*

'3\*^:  
K M

Fig. 27 *Post Porn Modernist: onstage douche* (Eric Kroll)

•AW      &ft      3?£&iffi&B33Htfl  
y » "

4' »



W &      as<sup>\*>13</sup>

\*?4£fcj





Fig. 30 Sprinkle (L) and Stevens 2005 ([www.google.co.za](http://www.google.co.za))

## Chapter Six

### **Bringing the Body Home: the problems and possibilities of feminist performance art in South Africa**

#### **Introduction**

In the previous two chapters, I have analysed the performance art work of two western white female artists and have applied the theories of western feminists to readings of the work. My position on feminism and feminist performance art as I write this final chapter is not concretised. I am compelled to question how the tools of western feminism can be critiqued and/or applied to the specific context of 'home', that is, the specific context of South Africa. I also question whether western feminist discourse and cultural praxis is applicable or relevant to the lives and experiences of 'third world' or developing nation women.

Chilla Bulbeck (1998:129) states that: "As Third World women, our sexuality has been subject to public scrutiny and judgement, we are viewed as either oversexed or asexual, immoral or puritanical". Of course Bulbeck's statement is fraught with reflexive issues, for who exactly is her 'Third World Wom[a]n' and where is she located (and indeed, who is the invisible 'public'). However, Bulbeck's argument is useful as a starting point for my own: she is discussing sexuality specifically in the above quotation, but I contend that 'sexuality' and 'bodies' are somewhat interchangeable terms if it is accepted that historically, female sexuality and bodies have been ideologically bound. Concepts such as 'sexuality' and 'the body' are tied to the discursive structures of contemporary poststructuralism which has, in turn, emerged from a *milieu* of western academia and thus complicates the issue further. However, I argue that the condition of living 'female' in patriarchal societies results *ipso facto* in the problematic construction of female bodies as available for genderised scrutiny, albeit in varying forms. As has been argued in previous chapters, it is the 'female body' across the board that has been subjected to the scopic intelligence of aesthetics, medicine and anthropology, and not the 'Third World Woman' who is exclusively pathologised. The specificities of race, class and familial structures influence the ways in which the female body is brought into visibility, and it is the crush of

gender and racial imperialism that I will consider in my reading of performance art works in Chapter Six. Moreover, I will interrogate the power structures that have excluded women 'of colour' in particular from having access to representational media.

Performance art does not enjoy corporate or broad public recognition in South Africa for a number of reasons. Amongst these reasons is that, despite the upheavals of post-colonial, post-apartheid democracy, 'theatre' and 'art' remain in fairly exclusive categories and are entrenched in a conservative, masculine-dominated canon. I cannot help but think that South African cultural production, as I have perceived it in attendance at various festivals and productions, remains bound to a conservatism that is a hangover of sorts of Christian Nationalist dogma which is in turn reinforced by nostalgia for an Utopian future.\*" Radicalism in the arts is rare and discouraged such that queer performance artist Steven Cohen had his commission for *The David* exhibition in Johannesburg renege. The decision to renege on Cohen's invitation to the corporate-art event is damning to the notion of critical cultural practice within a supposedly liberal democracy, leading Robyn Sassyn to comment:

Sadly, in our pre-teen democracy, money still speaks of parochialism. Why bring on the shock queens only to push them away when you realise they are for real? After all these years of struggle, is art in South Africa still a pretty frill around the muscle of patronising money? (The Witness, January 14, 2006:15).

Cohen's butt-and-penis revealing, shit-dealing (literally) public interventions typically lack the decorum and taste of conventional 'high art' events (Bosch 2005). Whilst, given the economic and racial divisions of South African society, there is no homogenous art-viewing public, suffice to say popular taste amongst the moneyed classes has generally been constructed around glib neo-classicism and the ubiquitous landscape/wildlife painting. Both at the level of the corporate art event and commercial art, the explicit body is conspicuous in its absence. However, 'the body' is a hotly contested site within the now not-so-new dispensation and whilst there are numerous verbal arguments about 'identity',

\*" Although this is somewhat anecdotal information, I do think that the revival and reification of works such as *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (1996) hints strongly at the ethical and aesthetic disorientation of art and artists in South Africa. This 'anecdotal information' is drawn from my attendance and participation in The National Arts Festival in Grahamstown from 2001-2006 consecutively, The Hilton Arts Festival in 2006, and the JOMBA! Dance Experience in 2004 and 2005.

'origins' and who has the right to what, many South Africans remain fundamentally somatophobic in the main, ghosted perhaps by the rhetoric of *die swaart gevaar*, *die rooi gevaar* (translated quite literally as 'the black danger' and 'the red danger') and now, the threat of the other in the HIV/Aids pandemic. The body, particularly in its explicit gendered capacity, is secreted away, as in the case of Cohen cited by Sassyn. I would argue that the body is not viewed broadly as a political tool in the same way that political rhetoric and financial 'clout' are perceived as instrumental. The body-African is also ghosted by the pejorative terms of the savage/civilised dichotomy. However, the legacy of South Africa is built upon a history of abjected body-identities and not least of all a history of women's bodies that ghost dominant narratives. Women's gender-specific issues and histories have tended to be sublimated under broader human rights jargon and mainstream politics so that an outdated institutionalised feminism, based upon liberal humanist assumptions of gender 'equality', remains entrenched.

The aesthetic boundary of skin remains highly contentious in South Africa, and at one level this is understandable, as 'skin' is a contentious issue in a racially divided society. Perhaps the seeming fragility of 'democracy' has made artists reluctant to work with the complexities and contradictions of flesh, particularly in terms of performance art as a medium. I do not imply that in developed nations there is a bevy of censorship-free, well-funded performance artists. I do however argue that the spaces that performance art inherits and shifts are important to reworking or retelling the legacy of the body-subject inherited from a past that we did not choose and a present in which an art of dissent is not welcomed readily.

The notion of 'retelling' provokes questions around subjectivity- and of course the concept of 'the subject' is inherited from western psychoanalytic theory which is itself, as has been discussed specifically in Chapter One, challenged to a feminist 'retelling'. The anxiety that I have about the notion of 'subjectivity' outside of a western paradigm is that the idea of 'the subject' *vis a vis* psychoanalysis could merely reiterate western imperatives of individualism and scientific rationalism. This anxiety is similar to that expressed in the first chapter about the application of psychoanalytic theory to feminist discourse- a connection that is fitting I think as both feminism and post-colonial theory deal with issues of domination and oppression. Thus, in the following section I recontextualise briefly the discourse of psychoanalysis that was discussed in Chapter One before going on to provide

an historical framework as a further contextual layer for the discussion of the work of Tracey Rose and Berni Searle respectively.

### 6.1 Revisiting Psychoanalysis

Campbell (2000:5) states that: "Psychoanalysis can be seen as a quite elaborate form of ethnography- as a writing of the ethnicity of the white western psyche". This definition would seem a rather dismal take on the applicability of psychoanalytic theory to non-western contexts. It has been established in Chapter One that canonical psychoanalytic theory of the Freudian and Lacanian schools fails to represent a positive female psychic morphology and indeed renders women inferior, castrated males. However, I maintain that the tendency within psychoanalysis to narrativise psycho-social development can be useful to the development of accounts of the symbolic structures of non-western, non-European and indeed feminist cultures. Campbell's view of European psychoanalytic theory and its pervasive Oedipal narrative as a form of ethnography displaces Aids psychoanalysis from a dominant centre and suggests strongly that there is space for the development of alternate symbolic economies and bodily narratives. Thus, I would not want to reject psychoanalytic theory outright. Campbell (2000:22) states that:

We have to acknowledge not just dominant historical modes or discourse, but also the more marginal experiential histories, that do not necessarily circulate within our cultural symbolic in visible ways, but nevertheless are bodily narratives that have a potential voice, however abject or unconscious the dominant discursively makes them (emphasis mine).

I have argued throughout this thesis that the female body has been pushed aside in the construction of dominant power structures and representational economies and that the 'bodily narratives', so to speak, of the feminist performance artists discussed transgress the normative boundaries of Oedipalised feminine subjectivity. I am assuming, then, that the body of the post/colonial, female subject is imbued with potential resistant narratives that are not isomorphic with the displacements and projections of desire of post-colonial, Oedipalised subjectivity. Indeed, this idea of a subject that 'fits' the profile of the Oedipal narrative is an elitist construct. Whilst the Freudian Oedipal narrative and the reproduction

of heterosexual, active-male, passive female structures of desire have supposedly represented a social norm, the Oedipal complex in fact "...privileges white middle class and masculine sexuality", in turn "pathologising to the pre-Oedipal arena female sexuality, homosexuality, racial and working class difference" (Campbell 2000:132). So then, the pre-Oedipal is in fact the social norm whilst the Oedipal represents a (nevertheless dominant) minority. This argument is echoed in the logic of the structures of apartheid South Africa in which the myth of minority, white, masculine supremacy shaped and pervaded the collective imaginary, though of course not without resistance. Resistance to sexual domination has not, however, been equivalent to the struggle against racial domination in South Africa and we find ourselves in a complex situation in which, crudely put, the phallus, post- 'The Struggle', is merely passed between racial groups and sexual difference remains sublimated. In short, as I see it, there is a new phallogocentric elite emerging in South Africa (Hassen 2004). I do not wish to apply the Oedipal narrative *ad hoc* here. However, I do think that the split subject of psychoanalytic theory is a useful starting point for reinterpreting the multiple and contradictory subject positions that constitute South African gender identities.

The way in which I imagine psychoanalytic theory to be useful to the deconstruction and reworking of identities and cultural forms in South Africa is two-fold. The idea of the subject as fractured is useful for understanding how, for example, as a female one could be bracketed as racially superior whilst remaining sexually inferior. The subject in process *vis a vis* Kristeva is always in dialogue with the imaginary so that the subject is never finally fixed. This subject in process can be profoundly political, as has been seen in the work of Orlan and Annie Sprinkle, when the conditions of subjectivity are interrogated and reinterpreted through performance. I also think that psychoanalytic theory can be useful when it is exploited as a dynamic, narrative form. That is, the Oedipal narrative and phallic orientation of traditional psychoanalytic structures can be viewed as a *version* of psychic development that pervades western psychoanalysis- it is one narrativised version of the western psyche that uses various symbols and imagistic relations in its structure. The psychoanalytic tradition of using symbols and images to map the imaginary can, I think, be useful to /<sup>^</sup>imagining the subject, not least of all through performance art in which artists remark the body as an image and symbol. Of course, the way in which I think of this reimagining is not as a therapeutic process. Contrary to the therapeutic process, the performance artist's processes disrupt and transgress the unified

subject. Psychoanalytic theory provides a means for interpreting what performance artists do to and with their bodies by linking the flesh and the imaginary.

The remapping of imaginary structures is a dynamic and constantly shifting process that has appealed strongly to feminist artists whose work interrogates the construction of gendered identity. Sexual indifference, located in the body, is central to the Oedipal narrative and thus it is fitting that the body be pivotal in the reimagining of sexual difference. Campbell (2000:4) states that: "The kind of ethical symbolic you rely on to narrate your world depends on the situated bodily imaginary that supports it". Following Campbell's argument, I contend that to localise feminist praxis in the body counters psychoanalytic, medical and anthropological discourses that have historically located and fixed feminine 'nature' in a supposedly dysfunctional female corporeality. Also, locating feminist politics in the female body raises the question of the primacy of the phallus in the production of femininities in South Africa. Phallic power operates at various levels in South African societies, having inherited a conglomeration of Afro- and Eurocentric patriarchal discourses. As has been stated, the body in the imagination and the material body are in constant dialogue, as it were, a relation that Campbell (2000:45) terms "dialogic" and a relation in which the abject must be repressed in order to become a full and proper subject. In a country charged with racial divisions, it seems valid to consider the construction of the imaginary body in South Africa in terms of the repression of race as it operates with a simultaneous abjection and repression of the feminine-maternal.

#### 6.1 .i A question of representation

Non-western identities have been markedly absent from psychoanalytic frameworks, an absence that Campbell (2000:191) describes as "...a discursive negative presence". 'Blackness' and the imaginary 'primitive', 'dark' and 'uncivilised' other has ghosted the texts of psychoanalysis, an absence that has had a fundamental structuring influence upon the production of white identities and European 'civilisation' (*cf* Chapter Five). Women within the imperial project were positioned within an established racial and gender hierarchy in which white men were positioned at the top of a chain of being with white women, black men and then black women descending the chain of being towards savagery (Reddy 2000). The black body was marked as tending towards atavism (I will discuss racial typology further in the following section). If traditional psychoanalysis constitutes a

western ethnography, the white, male, heterosexual minority that its narrative structures represent supports a racialised and genderised taxonomy and indeed erases sexual and racial difference. If the mother's body is split and castrated from language by Freudian and Lacanian Oedipal narratives, then the body 'of colour' is similarly abjected and repressed into the mould of the animalistic, alinguistic and subhuman. The female subject within colonial and apartheid South African frameworks was never just female, but was positioned in terms of her race and gender (hence the aforementioned complications of racial and gender status). Clearly, the Oedipal narrative is an insufficient model for understanding the complexities of localised gendered subjectivity when there are contested patriarchal symbolic systems operating simultaneously. The structures of social exclusion and inclusion that Kristeva and Butler in particular view as constitutive of the subject are I think useful here for exposing the dualistic structure of white/black, civilised/savage and male/female identities and the radical dependence of these terms upon the other. Such a view of the structuring principles of the white western psyche does not concede the imaginary to a single fixed signifier (that is, the phallus) or a dominant narrative that privileges one sex or one race.

Feminist criticism has found canonical psychoanalysis to be phallogocentric. Racist thinking is, I contend, ubiquitous. Post-colonial feminism critiques western feminism's tendency to ignore racial difference between women whereby a generic western white woman pervades the popular imaginary as the apex of feminine appeal in terms of sophistication, appearance, speech and social interaction. Contrary to this, the 'black woman' has been imagined as the 'other-other' to the European-feminine ideal. In this sense, the female body of colour is doubly repressed. Fanon (in Campbell 2000: 179-80), dubbed 'the black Freud', states about the woman of colour: "I know nothing about her". Campbell (2000) contends that Fanon finds that, unlike the masculine-imperial subject, the subaltern status of the black woman is so far-reaching and entrenched that he cannot account for any form of psychic morphology in this regard." The imaginary figure of the 'black female' can also operate as a negative term and structuring principle of western feminist discourse:

<sup>1</sup> Spivak (1999:269) speaks of the subaltern as a subject who is displaced from power centres where he or she is silenced at the margins of dominant culture. Spivak (*ibid*) lists men and women amongst the illiterate peasantry, Aboriginals and the lowest strata of the urban subproletariat as the quintessential subaltern. In this category I also include women.

This [average third-world woman] leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and being third-world (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, religious, domesticated, family orientated, victimised, etc). This, I suggest, is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of [western] women as educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities and the 'freedom' to make their own decisions (Talpade Mohanty 2003:5).

Read from a psychoanalytic angle, Talpade Mohanty's argument indicates that the psychic construction of the 'empowered' feminine subject in the western imaginary is premised upon the negation of a 'base' femininity, embodied a stereotyped third world woman. So then, we return to an Oedipal-style organisation of drives, disavowals and repressions whereby, in order to become an individual, otherness must be repressed, or in Butler's (2004) terms 'lost', and the imperial logic of individualism reinforced. I do not think that there is an essential 'black female' imaginary that can be recuperated, just as I do not think that 'the repressed' can be thought of as "...a lost fact or datum, a link which once restored will return us to a form of historical continuity" (Campbell 2000:223). However, and I am certain that the discussion of Tracey Rose and Berni Searle's interrogations of identity politics will support this, there are certainly images, narratives and fragments of embodied non-white female identity-a "discursive negative presence" as Campbell (2000:191) states-that contest the dominant masculine, Eurocentric imaginary. I argue that the critical representation of the female body of colour in performance art by women of colour pushes the envelope of skin, as it were, so that race and gender become historicised and strategically employed terms. This returns us to the arguments of feminist theorists in Chapter One, who variously contend that there are indeed mechanisms whereby the morphological imaginary can be shifted, notably via the performative reinscription of the body's surfaces.

I have argued that psychoanalytic theory can be useful to the post-colonial cultural project insofar as we can conceive of the subject as contested and the body as a tool with which to resist hegemonic imaginary and material structures, specifically through the mimetic structures of performance art. In terms of this argument, I will look at the dubious theatrical inheritance of colonial and post-colonial South Africa, wrought through the gender-biased construction of the non-European body as innately savage and disorganised.

## 6.2 Staging Africans

The imperialist project in Africa necessitated the production of discourses about Africa and its indigenous populations that were constructed to be different from and inferior to the West. Imperialism operates within a peculiarly Eurocentric, masculine, heteronormative logic in which power differentiation between the positive masculine subject and the passive feminised subject necessitates dualistic and hierarchical social hegemony. Africa has long been characterised as feminine, a 'virgin territory' variously awaiting penetration, discovery and salvation (Gilman 1985, Brantlinger 1985). Like the female body that was discussed in Chapter Two, Africa has been spatialised in the western imagination. Brantlinger (1985:175) states: "As headline, best-selling reading, the "penetration" of Africa provided a narrative fascination that has been likened to space exploration today". Whilst popular literature of the time reinforced the ideological spatialisation of Africa, the project of ideological penetration extended to the bodies of colonised subjects. The scopic imaginary that witnessed the post-Enlightenment theatres of dissection in Europe turned its gaze upon the colonies where the so-called "opening up" (ibid) of Africa by the great explorers commenced in the late 1850s.' Concurrent with the theatricalisation of Africa, that is, representing Africa as something to be seen, was the theatricalisation of 'African' bodies. Displaying the body of the non-European, and marking the body to be read as savage, freak, heathen and/or animalistic (basically sub-human) served the imperial discourse of a civilising mission whilst allaying anxieties about racial and sexual superiority in Europeans. The 'black body' came to signify pollution and danger within the European imaginary, but the black female body is perhaps the site that has evoked the most intensive fascination and disgust in the discourses of colonisation. In other words, black women were lodged at the bottom of the 'chain of being'.

The doctrine of scientific rationalism, which underpins the ontology of racist imperialism, appeals to visible evidence for the truth of its claims. Proof of racial superiority was sought in the display of the body of the racialised other within a framework that already inscribed that body as pathologically different. Profit-seeking showmen in the nineteenth century imported numerous African and other non-European 'savages' to

<sup>54</sup>It is notable that forays into Africa by Victorian explorers was facilitated by the discovery and use of quinine as a prophylactic for malaria.

perform in Europe and America in anthropological displays. These anthropological theatres of display are really a form of canonical museology whereby the non-white body was introduced into western visual economies as a standardised, yet subjectively unstable, specimen, relegated to the circus and the museum rather than the bourgeois theatre or art gallery. The story of Saartjie [the diminutive of Sara/Sarah] Baartman, a !Kung woman from the now Eastern Cape, who was convinced to travel to Europe in 1810 by a British ship's doctor to be displayed there as an anthropological curiosity, is a paradigmatic example of the epistemic violence inherent in the imperial project and its modes of display. I trace the story of Baartman's display to serve as an example of the representational history that Rose and Searle inherit and contest.

Baartman was exhibited in England and France for five years to display her steatopygia, or protruding buttocks amidst popular speculation about her genitalia or the 'Hottentot apron' (the manually stretched pudenda of KhoiKhoi women) (Wiss 1994). Baartman was referred to in the popular press as the "Hottentot Venus", having the proportions that were supposedly idealised (by men) in her culture. The abolitionist ire that was provoked around her exhibition was premised not so much around the racist and sexist discursive framework of visibility that attended her exhibition, but was focussed upon the indecency of displaying a body of such perceived corpulent excess to the public. Baartman's nudity could not be assimilated under the rubric of the classical Venus, but was interpreted nevertheless in a perverse framework whereby the body became a site of fascination and disgust: "The 'Hottentot' represented a fantasy creature without language or culture, without memory or consciousness, who could never actually threaten the viewer with the sexual power of a 'Venus'" (Strother 1999:2). Baartman, standing in for all non-white women, was framed to be viewed as the sum of her lower parts, or as a grotesque (see Bakhtin 1965, Wiss 1994). Further to this, the European inability to recognise *IKhoe*, with its many clicks, as a language was taken as proof of further degeneracy in the black body.<sup>55</sup> Perceived corporeal excess and lack of recognisable language resulted in the positioning of the 'Body Hottentot' outside the borders of 'civilisation'. However, the

<sup>55</sup> Prior to European encroachment in the seventeenth century, the Khoikhoi (people of people) were "successful nomadic pastoralists, ranging over a vast area between Northern Botswana and the Cape of Good Hope" (Strother 1999:2). The origin of the naming of the Khoikhoi as the pejorative 'Hottentot' by Europeans is likely the result of linguistic confusion. Strother (*ibid*) states that [*m*]ost dictionaries favour derivation from a compound of the Dutch *hateren* (to stammer) and *tateren* (to stutter), formed in response to Khoisan clicks. *Huttentet* in Dutch signifies someone who stutters or stammers. It should be noted that

positioning of the racialised body is inseparable from that body's sex and gender encoding. Baartman was marked black and also female and as such the body was analogous with the prostitute-body. Her body became a territory to be 'uncovered' by science and indeed, after her death in 1815, her cadaver was given to the eminent French anatomist Georges Cuvier for forensic investigation.<sup>3</sup> It was assumed that she had died of a racialised predisposition to bodily corruption brought on by the vice of alcohol and sexual excess (there was no investigation of possible abuse or poor living conditions). With the surgical knife, Cuvier could penetrate the boundary of skin in search of proof that racial degeneracy lay in the very interior of the body-Hottentot, particularly in the enigmatic buttocks and genitalia that had captivated the public imagination." After nearly two centuries of being stored at the *Musee de l'homme* in France, Baartman's remains were repatriated to South Africa from France in 2004, though not without resistance from French authorities.

The interest for this study in the framing of Saartjie Baartman's body is in the ways in which that framing speaks of the persistent defacing and silencing of female bodies through the re-presentation of the body. Clearly, this re-presentation has genderised and racialised imperatives. The theatricalisation of femininity and particularly racialised femininity remains in contemporary global capitalist cultures a phenomenon that has epistemological roots in the cultures of display that developed out of western expansionism since the seventeenth century. In the case of Baartman, the body was theatricalised so that the imbrication of racial and gender difference became the markers of inferiority— in a word, she was ugly." In the anthropological theatre of display, the subject is overdetermined by a racialised framework that exploits the presence of the body as evidence of what has already been assumed about the subject's identity. In other words, the opportunity to transgress the visual framework is limited. Similarly, the problem of cultural

Baartman, in addition to her home language, spoke Dutch and some French although, predictably, neither her voice nor words were recorded.

<sup>56</sup> Cuvier had Baartman's entire body cast in plaster, her genital organs moulded separately in wax, and dissected her cadaver and brain which were preserved along with the complete skeleton. The cause of Baartman's death was given minimal attention- it was assumed that the 'savage' body was naturally susceptible to alcohol and promiscuous behaviour that had compromised her health and therefore her lifespan (Wiss 1994).

<sup>57</sup>Black women, in comparison to white women, were said to exhibit overdeveloped labia. This generalisation was interpreted as a sign of lascivious sexuality analogous to the corporeal excesses of the prostitute. Gilman (1985) states that in autopsies of black males at the time, the measurement and discussion of male genitalia is ignored whereas the measurement of female genitals was compulsive.

<sup>5</sup> I find it of no coincidence, then, that even in the contemporary fashion milieu- that bizarre theatre of mute female bodies- standards of beauty remain decidedly Aids.

framing is a fundamental challenge for feminist performance artists who attempt to transgress the phallic imperative that inscribes female flesh.

It can be seen that sex, gender and race cannot possibly be thought of as exclusive terms when critiquing phallogocentric representations, for the dualistic and monotheistic logic of a 'phallic ontology' seek to tie racial, sexual and gender identity to identifiable bodily pathology and thus a gender and racial hierarchy. That is, 'proof of sexual and racial difference has been historically sought in the body. In turn, the body of the other is remarked (Phelan 1993) by an institutionalised metalepsis (that is, taking the effect to be the cause).

I now jump some two hundred years to the post-Struggle present in which Saartjie Baartman's remains have been repatriated. Certainly there are numerous changes to race and gender relations, at least at the cosmetic level of policy. However, the frameworks for viewing the female body remain entrenched in a masculinist imaginary and grand historical narratives. Van de Watt (2004:unpaginated) states:

The story of South Africa's liberation is most often told in the grand narrative of the struggle and liberation of an oppressed people. But what allows that moment of freedom? How do we measure democracy or gauge our transformation over the last ten years? Quantifying new houses that were built, electricity supplied, and water pipes laid, or assessing black equity and political representation are reliable ways to survey our democracy and its failures. But what is inevitably obscured by these public narratives are the more intimate accounts of personal discoveries that are, partly, the result of a changed political landscape (emphasis mine).

Van de Watt's argument points to the problematic emphasis upon quantifiable change in the discourse of nation-building whereby the situated bodily narrative that Campbell (2000) defines is obfuscated. To me, this is an indication of the typical privileging of logos that is an inheritance of eurocentric patriarchy. Ratelo (2004: 149) states that:

[ it has been] neglected by many pro-liberation writers, especially, to see apartheid as a sexualised male ideology [which] stems in part from the fact that the struggle for South Africa" was also masculinised... the national

struggle was cast primarily as a race struggle between black and white men and less as a radically exhaustive struggle between all those with power and all those without. Because of the privileging of the racial struggle, the liberation project tended to overlook, for instance, the right of the father to rule. Within such a framework of what it was we were struggling for, it became easy to see how women became the spoils of the war between white males' idea of a perfect society and black males' quest for freedom (excision in original).

Indeed, the racialised 'white panic' surrounding the crumbling of the apartheid regime has perhaps less to do with anxieties around racial difference than the loss of phallic privilege for white men. Racism, then, becomes a displaced form of sexual anxiety. Phallic privilege is grossly assumed in South African culture so far as to be naturalised. Thus, for feminist performance artists in South Africa, the framework for viewing the body-displayed is fraught with anxieties around race and gender. The pressures of the flesh are exacerbated by the dual historical-representational legacy of an imported classical canon and anthropological theatres of display. The explicit representation of the female body in a South African context is complicated further by the stereotype of the 'black female' as both a victim and perpetrator of racial danger and pollution : she is represented as both the quintessential victim of poverty and disease as well as a primary carrier (*cf* Leclerc-Madlala 2001 for an analysis of the stigmatisation of black women as primary HIV carriers). The explicit female body of colour, then, tends not to be regarded as a legitimate tool for resistance in part because the body has been so overexposed in the imperial project. Performance art is a marginalized form in South Africa and I am certain that this is the case primarily because it is body-centred. The frames for viewing the female body in this context are highly contested. Indeed, I do not believe that at present that there is a tolerant public space or viewing framework in existence for feminist performance artists to perform with the explicit body as a primary tool in the way that a male artist such as Steven Cohen does. Perhaps there is too much at stake for feminist artists in re-presenting the body explicitly in public, perhaps it is simply too dangerous, given the assumption borne out in practice that South Africa is a highly misogynistic society. It is thus I think an indication of the context in which they work that Rose and Searle are known more for their video works than live performance. The reflexive reframing of the coloured female body specifically by these artists is established in the use of a critical mimesis whereby the

markings of race and gender are mimed back across the body. By re-viewing the spectacle of the body of colour that had been institutionalised as an anthropological curiosity, Rose and Searle make use of their bodies as a critical medium. I will look at their work as examples of how the performance of bodily identity can disrupt the historical inheritance of racialised thinking and hegemonic constructions of racial and gender identity.

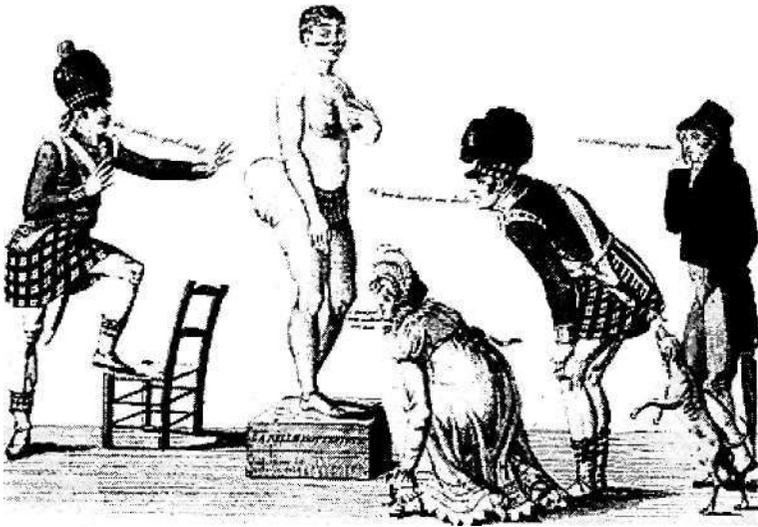


Fig. 31 A typical French caricature of Baartman ca 1810

### 6.3 Love Me/Fuck Me : *Tracey Rose*

Tracey Rose (b1974) is an artist of mixed race who grew up under the apartheid racial classification system as 'coloured'. Being of 'mixed race' presented a unique set of problems for the artist both in terms of apartheid legislation and post-apartheid polarisation between black and white. Moreover, as I have reiterated, racialised thinking is ubiquitous with a genderised ontology that is inherently masculinist. Of course the racial category of 'coloured' proved troublesome for apartheid legislators because the coloured body does not sit easily on either side of the borderline between black and white and speaks of a failure on the part of the authorities to prevent miscegenation. Rose states bluntly: "apartheid never stopped people from seeing each other and fucking: I'm the living proof" (<http://www.africultures.com>). This idea of the body as 'living proof' is something that can, I think, be taken up in the discussion of Rose's performance art. The living body, in process, already always resists discursive categorisations and prohibitions. The body's surface or skin, whilst being a 'proof (in terms of 'copy') is also a foil, as Rose shows when she takes on multiple personae in her performances. The body becomes a site for

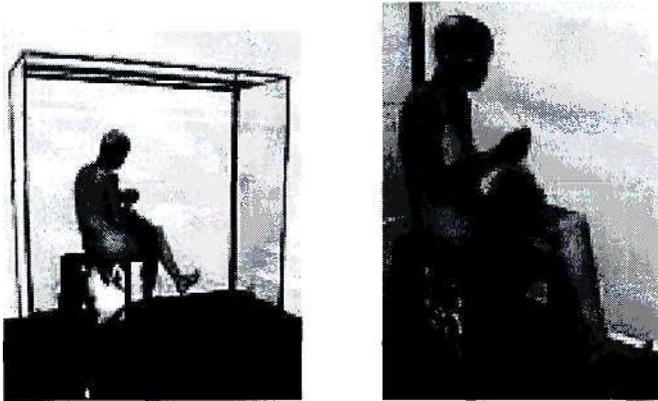
resisting the conditions that a society which, despite democratisation, remains bound by racialised and sexist discourse and, accordingly, a preference for contained art. That is, South Africans remain rather conservative about 'the body' in performance and the female body removed from its normative commercial or medical framework.

Rose disrupts the representational margins that have been handed down to her in racial, gender and religious forms. The disruption of these margins is forged through a strategy of laughter or *jouissance*. Jamal recognises this strategy in Rose's photographic work, *The Kiss* (2002). In the large-scale photograph (125 x 125cm) a nude, pale-skinned woman lies across the lap of a black-skinned male. Jamal (2004: unpaginated) describes the composition of the image: "The man is seated on a plinth, back upright, head in contemplative profile, lithe legs dangling in the air. The woman lies across him, an odalisque with legs and arms in a delicately tangled flutter". The photograph upends Rodin's classical precedent by at once mocking classicism's perverse obsession to race and gender homogeneity whilst mimicking the canonical work's composition. The duality of the work- both mocking and celebratory- is proper to the idiom of laughter. Laughter in the sense that I use it to discuss Rose's work refers to a libidinal impulse or energy that is released by the friction of contradiction. Laughter, in this sense is: "what lifts inhibitions by breaking through prohibition (symbolised by the Creator) to introduce the aggressive, violent, liberating drive" (Kristeva 1984:225). What is happening in Rose's *The Kiss* is a subtle and multiple undermining of canonical conventions and prohibitions. Firstly, the use of flesh-and-blood bodies in a mock-up of Rodin's sculpture treats the body as a sculptable material in much the same way as Orlan assumes the flesh to be a plastic medium. Furthermore, the intimate embrace between a white woman and a black male plays upon the taboo subject of miscegenation and the dualistic construction of the black male as dangerous/desirable and the white female as virtuous/excitable (Keegan 2001). Both parties in the image look virtually soporific in embrace, it is hardly a vision of pathological relations. The representation of gender difference in *The Kiss* is not only tied to the issue of racial difference but to issues of gendered power dynamics. In the photograph, the soft-looking body of the female figure is supported by the muscular Hellenically proportioned male, which may reiterate a typical feminine object-passivity and active male dominance over the possessed object. However, Rose anticipates such readings, for as it turns out, she is the pale-skinned female in the photograph and the man is her American art dealer, Christian Hays. Perhaps then we can take the image as a comment upon the ubiquity of art

with sexual exchange, as Orlan and Sprinkle highlight. A canonical master (Rodin) in order only to debase the power centres that have established his, and other canonical work, in the first place. Rose also subverts racialised aesthetic imperatives by passing her body off as 'white' in the photograph. This both undermines the genealogical convention of the artistic genius as a *white* male and shows up the way in which racial classification is based upon arbitrary physical markers.

If women in general have been marginalized as artists, then non-white women especially have been excluded from making significant contributions to representational economies by proxy of their association with abject corporeality and the relegation of 'African' art to museum shelf as 'craft', curiosity and artifact. Sobopha (2005:127) states that, at the high point of colonial rule in Southern Africa, to be an aesthetic subject "[was] to be a gentleman, an owner of property and a controller of space. To be an aesthetic *object*, on the other hand, was: "...to be a member of the working class, a woman, or a racial Other who controls neither space nor access to property... the one who can see and appreciate beauty is the one who can exercise the right to rule over all those who are merely aesthetic objects" (*ibid*). As image-maker and aesthetic object in her works, Rose mimes back the privilege of the image-maker through her own body, thus dismantling these antagonistic categories. Her classification as 'coloured' itself destabilises static identity categories, for she is neither one thing nor the other but *both* at the same time. Contradictory subject positions are reiterated in *The Kiss* as the artist traces her own body into the work so that, as artist, her gaze constructs the scene *and* the object who will be viewed by the male counterpart in the picture, the 'eye' of the camera and a viewing public. This mobility, I think, allows the artist to negotiate between the positions of embodied subject, artist-who-looks and visual object. These contradictory positions open up a space for ambivalence and contradiction- the space that is opened up by the idiom of laughter- wherein antagonistic dualisms no longer hold.

Rose moves to live performance in some of her works, most notably *Span I* and *Span II*, which were performed at the South African National Gallery (SANG) as part of the second Johannesburg Biennale in 1997. In *Span I*, Rose employed a paroled ex-prisoner to incise text onto a wall of the SANG. The text comprised memories from Rose's childhood, most of which dealt with the problematic role that curly hair, or kroeshare, played in being categorised as 'coloured'. In *Span II*, Rose exhibited herself in a plexiglass display cabinet at the SANG. She sat naked, perched on a television turned sideways, knotting the hair that she had shaven off in a previous performance." Whilst *Span I* and *Span II* are complementary performances I am most interested in the contents of *Span II* because the artist has used her own body. Thus, my analysis will focus upon the latter performance.



Figs 33 and 34 *Span II* (1997) ([www.google.co.za](http://www.google.co.za))

The display of Rose's naked body in a museum case in *Span II* references directly the ethnographic theatres responsible for the display of the bodies of people 'of colour' in museum tableaux, public shows, or dissection and preservation of body parts, as discussed previously in light of the story of Saartjie Baartman. However, the artist has chosen to display herself, which raises the same question as it does for other female performance artists who use their bodies as an explicit medium in performance : does the act of placing one's body on display merely reinscribe the female body as a theatrical product of the scopopic imagination or can this viewing framework be transgressed effectively? Indeed, de

" In *Ongetiteld*, a video performance produced in 1997, Rose is presented naked and alone being videoed as if by a surveillance camera. In the video, she is shown shaving off all of her body hair. She said about the performance: "(It) is about both de-masculating and de-feminising my body, shaving off the masculine and feminine hair. This kind of de-sexualisation carries with it a certain kind of violence. The piece is about making myself unattractive and unappealing. But what was disconcerting was that I suddenly became attractive to a whole different group of people" (in Mackenny 2001).

Lauretis (in Mackenny 2001 : 15) contends that 'woman' is unrepresentable "...except as a representation". It is clear that Rose is not attempting to uncover an essential feminine symbolic that is hidden beneath representations of gender-and race, but is rather deconstructing and critiquing the conditions whereby gender and race come to be intelligible, that is, the frameworks in which and through which gendered and racialised bodies are constructed and viewed. As Mackenny (*ibid*) states : "Performance art is one of the prime 'stages' to re-imagine gender [and race] identity as it allows a rescripting of conventions and a 'playing out' of such rescripting". Although the choice to re-display the body risks reiterating the convention of eliding 'woman' with 'body', this anxiety perhaps esteems verbal communication (the ability to speak) above the flesh.

Rose's inclusion of the video image of herself as a reclining nude on the horizontal television set in *Span II* is a reflexive gesture against the assumed passivity of the female nude. Rose (in Sobopha 2005 :128) states: "With my naked body on the TV I wanted to negate the passivity of the reclining nude. In doing the piece, I had to confront what I wasn't supposed to do with my body". What is it that she is 'not supposed to do' with her body ? It has been established that it is taboo for a woman to display her body of her own volition (she will be marked as 'whore'). Furthermore, to position herself as artist and art-object contradicts western canonical standards whereby the aesthetic object should bear no traces to its maker. The act of knotting her shaved hair draws attention to another level of contradiction in Rose's identity-performance : her hair especially marks her as coloured and thus neither 'white' nor 'black'. The coloured body sits on the ethnographic borderline between the imagined pollution and danger of the black body and the purity and civilisation of the white body. During apartheid, the coloured body was identified primarily by reference to *kroes* or tightly curled hair which could be subjected to the notorious 'pencil test'(N. McCloy, 1999, pers. comm\*).<sup>60</sup> On the one hand, having straight hair as opposed to *kroes* (curly or crinkled) hair is a privilege whilst on the other hand "...having straight hair [if you were coloured] meant you were often insulted for thinking you were white, or pretending to be white"(Sobopha 2005 :129).

For the purposes of racial classification, it could be ascertained whether a person was coloured enough (that is, had enough 'black' blood) to be placed in that group or not by means of a 'pencil test'. This crude test involved a pencil being placed in the individual's curls- if the pencil held, the person swayed on the side of coloured rather than white (\*N. McCloy, 'coloured' activist and personal acquaintance, Lesotho).

The act of having shaved off and then working with her hair as if it were a string of rosary beads is a refusal by Rose to identify with the pejorative connotations of being classed as 'coloured'. It is also, as Rose explains, a refusal of a fixed gender identity and a meditation upon the ambiguity of race and gender. Rose explains that she is 'intrigued by the fact that body hair on a woman's stomach and nipples border on masculinity' and that '[confronting this hair is, to an extent, about confronting sexual ambiguity]' (*ibid*). The image of hair also raises issues around socially appropriate and historically specific styles of bodily grooming and presentation. Female body hair is subject to various taboos and prohibitions across a range of cultures that insist that hair be depilated or screened. In terms of racial difference, hair is a loaded bodily feature, its length, texture and styling being marked with status or denigration : long, straight, fair hair tends to be idealised in terms of a dominant Aids beauty standard. Black and coloured women regularly subject their hair to chemical treatments and straightening procedures. This in itself is not problematic, but an attachment to a Aids standard is insofar as it reinforces a homogenous, and highly marketable, version of femininity. Rose's body is a dubious spectacle in that it cannot be read as a sexualised image nor medical specimen. The abject, shaven form repulses sexual connotation whilst the lucidity of the artist, and the framing of the act as a performance, removes the body from the scrutiny of the medical scenario.

By re-framing her body inside the display case and again within the television screen and then working with bodily materials (that is, her hair), Rose mimes the epistemic violence of the scrutinising, scopic imperial [white, male] gaze that has historically established viewing frameworks for bodies on display. Via the performance of a critical mimesis, Rose mimes the body that has been defined by discourses of scientific racism and misogyny, that is : "By the displaying and staging of her body, Rose focuses on the body, not as a biological entity, but as socially and physically constructed" (Sobopha 2005 : 129). Rose thus points to the ideologically invested yet arbitrary fixing of singular identities upon the body's surface by reference to physical featuresjn this instance hair. So then, what she is not 'supposed to do with [her] body' is, because of her race and gender, to upset the borderlines that construct her race and gender. She is able to upset the circularity of this precedent by using her racially marked and gendered body to talk back, as it were, against stereotypical and dominant myths that figure the body as 'coloured' and 'female'.

Rose continues to work with her body in video installations, such as *Ciao Bella* (2003). Whilst she is clearly a multimedia artist, the body remains central to her performative style. It is in video art that Rose is able to perform multiple personae, or at least appear to do so, simultaneously. The seamlessness of her changes in appearance in the mediated form of video or photography perhaps lacks the dialectical tension of the work of Orlan (who exposes the process of her interventions) but, as I will discuss, still holds some interesting possibilities in terms of negotiating gender and race representation.

I viewed *Ciao Bella* at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown in 2003, where the triple-screen DVD projection was accompanied by still photographs of the various iconographic females in the video. All of these 'types' are performed by the artist. The DVD is a looped progression that follows a variety of carnivalesque costumed females through a scenario that draws upon the composition of typical Renaissance paintings of *The Last Supper*. Schmahmann (2004 :49) describes the work as '...a curious inversion of its patriarchal prototype', as 'the work provides an arena in which various personages...perform their femininities'. Rose's revision of the male-dominated scene of *The Last Supper* is evidenced in her treatment of space : the characters perform across the visual plane so that their actions are emphasised across the horizontal axis, rather than the verticality implied by the classical vanishing point and its masculinist assumptions of time dominating space. I quote Schmahmann (*ibid*) *verbatim* for her description of the content of the DVD projection :

'Love me. Fuck me. Love me. Fuck me' are the words of a female boxer whose pugilist energies are directed at her own body. 'Tell me, are my thighs too large ? And tell me, are my legs too short ? And tell me, are my toes too small ? And tell me, are my fingers too short ? And tell me, tell me, are my calves too thin ?' asks an ambiguously sexed and tiny Lolita seated on the edge of the table in the manner of Humpty Dumpty on his wall. Apparently unsatisfied with the assurances provided by an Afro-haired and chip-eating mermaid who intones soulfully 'You are so beautiful to me' Lolita jumps off the table and runs to the foreground where she screams abuse at the viewer. Meanwhile, one hears the taut gyrations as a Playboy bunny girl bounces up and down behind the table, the rustle of shakers wielded by a cheerleader who is partially obliterated by the work's right margin, and the rhythmic sound of lashes as a smiling Cicciolina, crouching on the

table, enacts the role of flagellant. A Marie Antoinette mostly prefers silence ; with pursed lips and nursing a ballroom mask representing an infantile male, she focuses her energies on the task of cutting and apportioning chocolate cake. Sarah Baartman descends into view as the operatic mermaid begins a hymn invoking the idea of Communion, then mutates into her bottled genitalia which in turn acquire wings and ascend heavenwards— a spiritual transformation that is unceremoniously interrupted by the bunny girl, who takes on the role of a gun-wielding guerilla. The ensuing blood bath is cleaned up by 'Mami', a bespectacled individual in a suit suggestive of Maggie Thatcher's sartorial tastes. Stoically, and with total self control, she wipes the viewer's blood-soaked window/windscreen onto this strange scenario, and, magically, all the personages at this reworked Last Supper come to life. 'Ciao, Ciao, Ciao' they sing happily, in the manner of players bidding farewell at the end of a musical, and the image on the triple screen dissolves into heavenly blue.

I am indebted to Schmahmann's detailed description of the work, as I did not remember it in detail so much as I remember laughing with friends at the carnival of female characters. I want to unpack *Ciao Bella* in terms of my remembered response of laughter because, although on one level the video work is a formal incursion into classical aesthetic standards and the norms of static visual art, I think that the idea of laughter is central to reading Rose's performance of multiple personae. Unrestrained laughter is a characteristic of the carnivalesque. The carnival, argues Bakhtin (1968) provides a social space in which hierarchies are inverted and the diabolic is given free rein. The carnivalesque thus allows for liberation through laughter.

I have already mentioned the way in which the emphasis upon horizontality subverts the staging of canonical (painted and theatrical) dramas in which the female body is inferred as the spatialised place where the active phallic principle takes shape. The horizontal axis is of course the preferred one for the typical female nude and the axis for passivity. However, in *Ciao Bella*, the one-made-many of Rose's body dominates the scene in various fetishised female forms. It is uncertain who the original, identifiable one is, which begs the question of origin and identity. The post-Enlightenment ideal of individualism as key to the full and proper subject is shattered by Rose's consideration of performing images of multiple selves. Jamal (2004 :unpaginated) states that, by placing

herself at the centre of her art, Rose "[d]oes not thereby fetishise or memorialise herself, but, in an act of mimicry, of self-mockery, Rose introduces the importance of play, of the performative, in the making of art and the ceaseless recreation of one's cultural and socio-historical identity". By enacting various iconic female personae seemingly at once (obviously this is enabled by the use of video editing) Rose points to the multiple points of power and influence that construct the female body as fetish object and in turn, how various forms of re-fetishisation (such as *The Mermaid*) may subvert the passivity of the object. The body-object, that is, the fetishised females, in *Ciao Bella* are excessive to the point of being grotesque. This, to my mind, signifies the threat of the object to the phallogocentric imaginary. This threat, and possibility, is embodied for me in *The Mermaid* who not only sports a 'loud' afro hairstyle, but also sprouts a large dildo-phallus from her crotch area. A mermaid, having a tail, is ambiguously sexed and is thus antithetical to the full and proper subject. The mermaid is conventionally inscribed as a beautiful monster : in this case, she is non-white and possesses a phallus. However, the threat of the 'monster', like the impotence of the *swaart gevaar* in *The Kiss*, is disarming if not delightful. It is because of the grotesquerie of quasi-icons in *Ciao Bella* that the viewer—that I, am able to laugh. This laughter, I argue, opens up an imaginary space, if by increments only, wherein difference can operate sans the epistemic violence of divisive logic. According to Jamal (2004: unpaginated), a performative art has a vital role in enabling the production of an ambiguous, playful cultural space:

Art, the apogee of apparent redundancy, is the sphere that best achieves playfulness. When in that rarest instance art is stripped of accountability, left to its singular and impoverished devices, when it is not roped into the tawdry and dull enterprise of nation building, art precisely allows for an opening to a surprise.

The opening to a 'surprise' is, I think, an opening to the idiom of laughter that disrupts the subject so that his/her psycho-social boundaries are remade. Clearly it is not merely the viewer whose psychic boundaries are pushed by performance artists, as they enact through their own bodies. Changing the body, through costume, gesture, even surgery, is a means of shifting personal as well as macro-historical precedents. Rose (in Williamson 2001 :unpaginated) states :

making work is a documentation of a journey- each stage, each process, each dilemma has to be worked through. ..I want to take one step at a time. When you make an artwork you're not just doing something at that moment, you're contributing to an entire history of artwork.

So then, Rose, counter to art-making towards the 'tawdry and dull enterprise of nation building', is invested in the process of artmaking in order to deconstruct the historical and ideological frameworks of representation. The 'opening to a surprise' that Jamal argues art can allow is precisely what feminist performance artists have exploited by placing their bodies at the centre of their work. That 'opening' is, I think, the possibility of radical difference being signified in the symbolic economy. By placing her body at the centre of her artwork and rendering the body a performative surface, Rose attempts to unpack the discursive field that constructs the very skin in which she lives. This deconstruction and re-working of the body's surface necessarily re-works the visual medium that has been manipulated historically to produce overdetermined racist and misogynist visual codes.



Figs 35,36,37 Figures from *Ciao Bella* (L-R) The 'Love Me/Fuck Me' Boxer, Marie Antoinette and Lolita

#### 6.4 Recolouring the body : Berni Searle

Berni Searle is a Cape Town-based artist who grew up during the height of apartheid and has emerged as an artist of international repute over the last decade. Trained initially as a sculptor she has, like body artists of the 1970s who were frustrated with static media, moved away from the sculpted form to using her own body as a moving and mutable surface. The body as a mobile signifier is an important concept for Searle who states :

I'm very aware of not wanting to represent myself in a way that is static. I think that the work itself exists as a result of a creative process, and often my processes attempt to convey something about [...] a flexibility and state of flux, which is central to my view of occupying multiple identities that are constantly changing (Searle in Bester 2003 :10)

Searle (*ibid*) continues :

When you talk about colour and South Africa as a context, you're generally talking about race. But when I use my body, I am a particular, gendered individual, and in that sense there is a multiplicity of identities that's being explored within the work. My work speaks in layers of fantasy and reality.

Searle does not distinguish between her body and an essential subjecthood, she locates body and subjectivity within a particular socio-historical context. However, this context produces the body. There remains a tension between the imaginary body (the 'fantasy' that Searle speaks of) and the material body (the 'reality') ; this relationship is never immutably fixed. The dialectical tension between the juridical classificatory systems of state control and the ambiguous, living body are interrogated by Searle : like Rose, Searle was classified as 'coloured' under apartheid legislation. The dialectical structure also comes into play in interrogations of gender constructs, for the gendered body is a site of overdetermined identity markings where cultural fantasies and markings come to dominate the material body and subjectivity. As has been noted, the body marked as 'coloured' represents an area of slippage in exclusive racial categories. Searle's use of her body as a performative medium investigates this area of slippage in order to re-imagine the racialised and gendered body.

Searle's classification under the apartheid system as 'coloured' is further complicated by the implied insignificance of her status as a woman. The invisibility of women's bodies in dominant historical narratives is evidenced even in the common Western 'family tree' system whereby matrilinearity or bloodlines (Irigaray 1991) are erased. Searle says of her heritage that:

It is difficult to trace my heritage but as far as I know I am not the descendant of slaves. There is also an assumption that all coloured people have Khoisan heritage. On my mother's side, my paternal history goes back to Mauritius and Saudi Arabia, and on my father's side, to England and Germany. But this only constitutes the origins of my great-grandfathers. I have not been able to find out much more about my great-grandmothers who could possibly have been the descendants of slaves. But actually...I don't know this for a fact (Searle in Schmahmann 2004:70, emphasis mine).

The origin of identity is conventionally embedded in paternity and patrilinear lines of descent that erase the bodies and contributions of women (Irigaray 1991). Searle's intention in performing her body is I think to a large extent about recuperating the ability of the body to signify multiple meanings and origins so that identity is thought of less as an origin and a borderline than as a temporary and strategic location that is constantly shifting, negotiated and fluid. Searle's photographic and video works are not, as I will discuss, an attempt to transcend her coloured and/or female skin/body, but constitute a reflexive reiteration (via a performative use of visual media) of the multiple axes of identity construction.

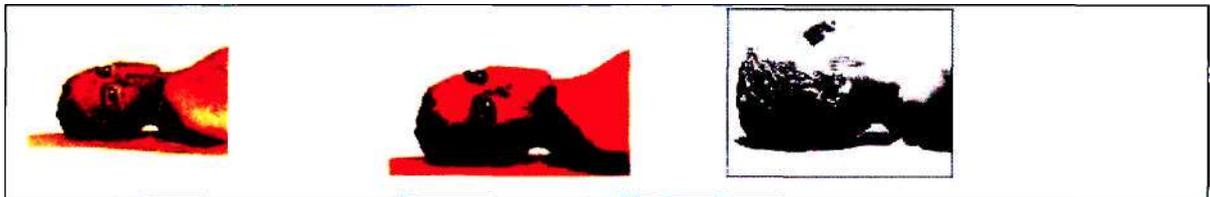


Fig. 38 *Looking Back* (1999) from the series, *Colour Me* (1998-2000) ([www.google.co.za](http://www.google.co.za))

Before 2001, photographic works such as the *Colour Me* series (1998-2000) anticipate Searle's subsequent performances for video installation. In *Looking Back* (1999), part of the series, the artist set up photographs of her supine naked body in profile variously covered in the richly coloured spices of paprika, turmeric, cloves and pea flour. In *Not Quite White*, also part of the series, her body is covered in off-white pea flour and photographed alongside worn-out measuring tapes. In *Not Quite White* Searle lies naked as if upon a dissection table, and covered with spices. The powders that are dusted heavily over her skin dislocate the body from a simple referential framework, for Searle stands in neither as a conventional classical nude nor as a medical/anthropological subject. The scale

of the photographs (up to half a metre long in the former works and billboard size in the latter) also removes Searle's body from conventional text-book or snap-shot sized references. Viewed within the context of South African history, the use of spices recalls the spice routes established by the Dutch East India Company. Spice is a little acknowledged commodity that underpins global expansionism and ensuing diasporic communities. Spice, writes Bester (2003 :15), "...binds Searle to a cultural heritage that is located in the 'border' space between migration and Diaspora, between colonialism's forced migrations and apartheid's refusal of diasporic identities". The use of the tape measure in *Not Quite White* along with the use of pea-flour to cover the artist's dark-skinned body reiterates the connection between the historical shifting of communities through expedient colonial trade and commerce and the simultaneous repression and relegation of diasporic or mixed communities to subaltern status beneath a Aids ('white') standard. The discursive production of the non-white body has of course long been supported by dubious quantitative methods-hence reference to the tape measure- in which the body of the racial other never quite 'measures up' to an imagined ideal (suffice to say, an imaginary white, male body). Searle (in Bester 2003 :20) states:

Systems of display and representation that are connected to colonial histories have informed my work for a while [...] In more recent works, like the Colour Me series, I use the language of ethnography to address and challenge stereotyping in South African politics, history and visual culture.

The subversion of 'evidential' ethnographic photography is a form of critical mimesis, whereby Searle mimics that form in order to interrogate its truth status. Also, the vivid colours of spice covering the skin, particularly in *Looking Back*, can be seen to transgress the arbitrary standards of racial classification and in a sense mock the classificatory quandary that the coloured body presents.

The use of spice to cover Searle's specifically female form also evokes the marginal social roles of women in the domestic sphere. Spice references the preparation of food by women and also recalls the unknown narratives of Searle's own foremothers. Spice functions as a dialectical image in its reference to domesticity and traditional feminine social roles and spaces whilst it is also given to connotations of the exotic and the lure and threat of the other. Although the spices on one hand result in a kind of anonymity

by obscuring the particularities of the body, and this is evidenced most clearly in *Not Quite White* where the body lies in profile as if it were a cadaver. The use of such great quantities of spice and their luminescent glow serve to draw attention to the image of the body. The mute body thus provokes questions as to who rather than what is represented, thus implying that the body has a unique narrative history. In *Looking Back*, Searle turns her gaze upon the camera which interrupts the gaze of the viewer and the power of the invisible camera to capture disinvested documentary evidence. The viewer, in this sense, is pushed into a position of ethical responsibility as s/he interprets the image, for there is a sense that there is some-body specific present in the photograph and not merely anthropological data assembled before the camera.

The photographic works that I have discussed are decidedly performative in that Searle shifts the margins between the passive body-object and active artist/photographer. Searle controls the camera lens and thus the means whereby her image is reproduced. She explains of the photographic medium that:

The camera is placed in a specific position and there are a number of formal and conceptual concerns that are negotiated. The use of the medium also draws attention to the way photography has been used, often as a way of producing 'evidence' that systematically classifies and categorises information. As a counter strategy to the use of the camera as a verification and proof, I have used the medium to withhold information, thereby pointing to an indeterminacy of content (Searle in Bester 2003 : 31).

It is significant, then, that Searle has moved beyond performative photography to video in which she uses her body to create moving and shifting images. The moving image risks fluidity and ambiguity but perhaps serves Searle's de- and re-construction of race and gender more effectively than static imagery. Searle maintains her considered approach to formal elements of composition and colour in her video works, but it is because of her use of flesh in constructing images that I consider her work pertinent to a discussion of feminist performance art. I will look at two of Searle's video-performances, namely *Snow White* (2001) and *Home and Away* (2003).



Fig. 39 Video stills from *Snow White* (2001) ([www.google.co.za](http://www.google.co.za))

*Snow White* is a synchronised dual video screen projection. The mural-sized screens show the same action, but one camera was placed directly in front of the artist as she performed and one directly above her. The piece begins with Searle kneeling, naked, eyes downcast in a darkened space, whilst white flour drizzles down onto her form, covering her entirely. She brushes the flour from her hair and then scoops it up into a mound, leaving dark trails of finger marks on the ground. The flour is kneaded together with water that has fallen from above and the loaf-shaped mass lifted in her hands. The mass of dough is later '[broken] up in a gesture that signals embrace and repulsion, construction and repulsion' (Sobopha 2005 :123). The simple material of flour takes on a personal and political resonance in *Snow White*. The artist's naked body is clearly marked as female and her kneeling position is a typically domestic-feminine one. Her skin is darkened further by deep shadow. The flour descends upon her skin, re-marking the body's surface with bright white. The way in which I interpret *Snow White* is as a revised 'fairytale' of sorts, to which the title alludes. The colour white has associations with virginal and racial purity, indeed the fairytale Snow White is an idealised 'white virgin'. Yet, if we consider the two moments of viewing that are established in Searle's dual projections 'whiteness', so to speak, is imposed upon the body of the racial and sexual other as a colonising ideology. The kneading of dough, from flour that has fallen from her skin, becomes a visual meditation for Searle upon the malleability of the imaginary body—in a sense, the dough is a way of rejecting assimilation under the rubric of white colonialism.

Searle's own form is formidable : her statuesque proportions and expansive movements do not for a moment indicate that her body is to be read as a passivised racial or sexual curiosity. This does not withhold a certain vulnerability that the ambiguous body-performed necessarily endures and Searle does not control the moment of viewing. Her

body is perhaps not readily available for sexual consumption by a masculinist gaze due to her choice to mediate her image with other materials and the careful selection of camera shots. Searle states about the choice to use lens-based media that: "Mediating the 'performance' through lens-based media provides me with options to reconstruct myself in the process" (Searle in Bester 2003 :34). Searle's working with the dusting of flour from her body's surface can be seen as an act of defiance and a refusal to internalise repressive racist and misogynistic discourses that turn a critical and biased gaze on the bodies of women and measure these against an imagined ideal. This refusal, however, does not set up a racial or gender polemic but deals with liminality or the in-between space in which fixed identity slides or is fluid. After all, Searle plays upon the tensions between black/white, flour/water, light/dark, the word/the image, never allowing the viewer to settle into a comfortable identification of her identity. In light of the discussion of *Colour Me, Not Quite White* and subsequently *Snow White*, Searle's practice as an performative image-maker can be viewed as a form of critical mimesis, whereby the epistemic violence that identifies and categorises bodies as fixed in the realm of unrepresentable abjection is mimed back against itself.

The last of Searle's works that I will discuss is *Home and Away* (2003), a video commissioned along with a set of lithographs by *NMAC Montemedio Arte Contemporaneo* in Vejer de la Frontera, Spain. As I will discuss, the work provides a fitting conclusion to this chapter, and this thesis as a whole, as it links and embodies a number of ideas and problems that I have grappled with.

As in *Snow White*, Searle uses a dual-screen projection in the installation of *Home and Away*. Bester (2003 :45) describes the images on the two screens :

The one projection, which includes her clothed body floating in the sea, has the Spanish coast in the background, while the other projection, sans body, is set against a Moroccan backdrop. The 'Spanish' projection starts with tightly cropped views of Searle's floating body...She is utterly relaxed, her arms stroking the water only intermittently. The single, continuous shot shifts between views of the deep, dark, calm water. An inky substance emerges from around Searle's skirt, before she is left to disappear into the distance. As the camera shot becomes wider, the Spanish coast emerges in the background. Searle's body disappears entirely and the

shot fades on the passing water. The 'Moroccan' projection is shot without Searle's body. It begins with and lingers on the sky before settling on a mass of calm sea and the line of the Moroccan coast. Again, the camera takes the viewer away from the coast...

Although in this work Searle moves away from a distinctive 'South African' idiom, she still deals with the body and identity as it purports to one's location within a complex network of relations and power differences. The location for the work is significant as it was produced at Vejer at the southern tip of Spain which is on the Strait of Gibraltar. It is a place that "brims with historical and geopolitical references to the movements of humans and trade not simply from Africa to Europe but also from east to west" (van der Watt 2004 :unpaginated). Entrances and exits from the Mediterranean have been enabled by this strait and, "eased by this point of access and contact, now-Catholic southern Spain was a Moorish and Islamic stronghold until the 1400's" (*ibid*). However, the installation has relevance beyond the specific site. It constructs a powerful image of a meeting point between a literal body (Searle) and the interstitial space of a body of water. In so-doing Searle comments upon the ambiguity and potential 'nomadism' of subjectivity : the constant state of crossing imaginary and material borders and boundaries that enables the subject to shift and change.

It is typical of Searle's video works to date that she deals with an interstitial space, quite literally a body of water between two land masses in this instance. Searle's body literally floats between Africa and Europe, a solitary form that is dislocated from solid ground. This dislocation has no sense of urgency, but is perhaps uncomfortable for the viewer who is left without a clear image of the 'outcome' : the body merely appears then disappears, moving between visibility and invisibility. The water, as carrier between countries and cultures, is a space where the body is between being and becoming. The nomadic space of being and becoming is, for me, precisely what Searle deals with when she floats, amidst ballooning, buoyed skirts in *Home and Away* : because there is no narrative closure and the land masses are indistinguishable from one another, we are left to consider a body suspended in time and space, a body-identity. In a voiceover, Searle repeats the conjugated forms of the Spanish verbs to love, to fear and to leave. The voiceover prompts associations with the idea of migration, both literal and figurative. A figurative migration indicates a shift in the body-identity's threshold. Insofar as she is a

woman, the idea of Searle's floating form and the interstitial space, wherein one is not one thing nor the other, provokes questions that are relevant to feminist politics : the image of the body in-between suggests that identity is constantly contested and remade through the crossing of physical and imaginary thresholds. However, Searle's body floats off amidst a jet of dark liquid, and so the body represented remains ambiguous, it is not baptised or returned into another symbolic code but remains suspended; in process as it were. The immersion and subsequent disappearance into an inky substance and the sea beyond performatively dislocates Searle's body from fatherland and mother tongue. Ontologically speaking, to float in-between, to locate an I temporarily is catachrestic because the fixity of the phallic, racialised symbolic (in fact, *any* symbolic) is given to slippage and difference.



Fig. 40 Video stills from *Home and Away* (2003) ([www.google.co.za](http://www.google.co.za))

### **Conclusion : towards radical performance in South Africa**

It has become apparent to me through my research that the choice for women to use performance art as a political tool in South Africa is difficult and risky. The arts in general seem to be the bastardised left-overs of corporate driven cultures and African Renaissance jargon. Both Tracey Rose and Berni Searle are recognised more for their multimedia/video work than for live performance. I think that the use of lens-based media may have several reasons for its appeal in a contemporary South African context. Searle says about the use of performance in her work that: "...there is an assumption that because it's performative, I perform. The problem with 'performing' is that I am more directly and easily consumed" (Searle in Bester 2003 :34). Searle's contention that she does not perform is underpinned by the knowledge that, with video, the artist controls the construction of shots and the editing process. I think the distinction that Searle makes between performance and the performative is that she chooses how to mediate the body whereas in live performance, the

body is given to a temporality that does not enable the performer to manipulate the viewing frame as instrumentally. Rose, on the other hand, seems to view the risk of performance-temporality as something to be relished : "With performance you script as much as you can and anticipate as much as you can, but what really creates the piece are those elements that are out of your control" (Rose in Murinik 2004 :36). So then, the performative control over the production of images that is offered by lens-based media has obvious appeal for South African feminist artists whose skin has been so rigidly re-marked in tangibly racialised and sexist society.

The refusal to internalise domination but to work with the body instead that is typically the site of domination characterises the work of many feminist performance artists. The body in South Africa has more typically been used as a vehicle for party-political protest and resistance- here I am considering things such as the familiar protest march. As an artistic medium, the body is an emergent choice. Clearly, the female body has historically been associated with the threat of racial pollution and so it is particularly effective for South African feminist artists to turn to the body in order to deconstruct racial and sexual prejudice. I do, however, think that the female body and by proxy disruptive feminist narratives tend to be sublimated beneath the phallic mark of patriotic nationalism. Artists such as Rose and Searle remain working in a marginalised capacity, obscured perhaps more by the postmodern imperial project of neoliberal capitalism than by the anthropological theatre.

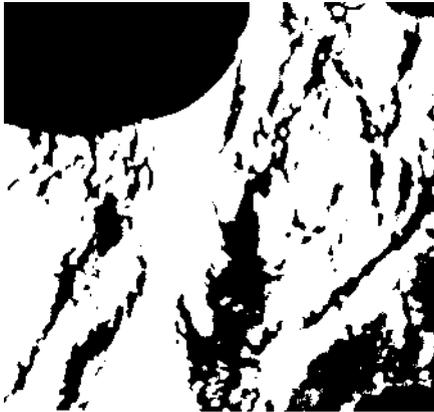
Figs 38,39 *Waiting No. 4* and *Waiting No 5* from *Home and Away* (2003) (Gaetano Hermans)

:%?

| J#\*

?\*\*\*\*\*, ;\.

|



### **Conclusions and recommendations for further research**

Part of my re-writing of feminist performance art is couched in the rather naive hope that the body has some special purchase upon the reinscription of the cultural domain, in a way that conventional theatre or written text does not. I am still convinced that 'the body' and 'the female body' in particular, is sublimated beneath sedimented discourses that produce these bodies. I am, however, aware of the precariousness of working within a feminist paradigm for there is always the lure of essentialism when reviewing that oversubscribed site of the female body. Despite such reservations, I think that the category 'woman' remains useful as a site from which to destabilise the repressive power relations and aesthetic norms and standards that have enabled the idea of 'woman' historically.

Despite the privilege that I grant 'the body' in this thesis, the body does not have a more or less powerful role in transgressing cultural norms and standards for, as I have argued particularly in Chapters One to Three, subjectivity, and indeed the production of cultural forms such as theatre, are as such by the very norms and standards that render the body intelligible. However, concepts of fluidity (and quite literally body fluids), the interstitial, perversity, laughter and heterogeneity that run through feminist performance art, such as has been cited in Chapters Three to Six of this thesis, position the body in these instances at the very limits of language and can be seen to transgress these limits. Western society can also be seen to remain entrenched in a profound somatophobia, particularly with regard to the female body and despite the emergence of technocratic societies. I think that there is a call to research further somatophobia in non-western contexts and particularly in the context of developing nations, such as South Africa, where gender issues are fraught with social, economic and historical tensions between the indiscrete categories of tradition, colonial influence and modernisation. Feminist performance art can thus be viewed as a means for critiquing dominant discourses on the body as well as an attempt to produce alternative discourses that move beyond scientific categories of gender and race.

In the broadest sense, this thesis has dealt with issues of representation. I have argued that representation is never devoid of the corporeal traces and power structures of the artist and that a phallogocentric representational economy retraces a phallogocentric imaginary in mainstream and canonical texts. The anti-canonical stylistics of feminist performance art indicates that the idea of 'standard', gendered or artistic, is an effect of the

privileging of idealised masculine subjectivity at the expense of abject otherness, and as such is obsolete. It is in this sense, I think, that Orlan maintains that 'the body' is obsolete. The trace of the body in the representational space of feminist performance art is not a trace of standardised femininity but is instead a marking of difference against the symbolic. Thus, when for example Sprinkle displays her cervix in public, she literally shows up the site of difference and traces it into the social space of performance. Like Orlan, Rose and Searle, Sprinkle resists, indeed transgresses, entrenched theatrical models of representation. The idea of 'tracing' also indicates a shift in the power structures that have excluded women generally from the role of representation and that has been challenged by the emergence of feminist performance, particularly from the 1970s onwards. In Chapter Six especially, it is clear that the changing social status of women, imbricated with racial power struggles, has a direct political correlation with the style and themes of representation.

'Feminism' in its more traditional liberal humanist and radical incarnations seems to have left a trail of tales of devastation and hopelessness in which it would seem that, before the language and law of the phallus, woman is at best an abjected historical survivor. However, what is borne out in the radical, body-centred praxis of the feminist performance artists discussed is that feminist struggles do not necessarily need to rely upon essentialised versions of gender identity, or for that matter, essentialised notions of racial identity. The discourse of identity, as a fixed node of power in operation that theorists such as Irigaray, Kristeva and Butler have been shown to reject, is in fact parodied and even rejected by the cited performance artists' identifications with the signifier 'woman'. Feminist performance art is thus a contradiction in terms, as there is no attempt in its practice to identify with an original female body, subjectivity or language. Rather, 'woman' is historicised and as such reinterpreted. The lie of 'woman' is thus displayed, if by increments. The title of the thesis serves to clarify this point, for it can be seen that the feminist performance artist is engaged in 'telling tales', both in the tattle-tale sense of exposing the symbolic edifice and in the way of re-presenting the body as a kind of tale or story. I maintain, in the title and throughout this thesis, that duplicity and contradiction are at the heart of the discourse of feminist performance art which in turns indicates that the body before the law and limits of the symbolic *does* have possibilities beyond mere survival. It is through artifice that 'identity' and 'the body' are exposed in feminist performance art as unnatural or discursively produced. This reflexive 'doubling back' upon

the discursive mechanisms that have produced particular identities can be seen as a form of critical mimesis and a bodily rewriting of, and against, the symbolic.

It is not only 'the body' that is deconstructed and re-presented in feminist performance art. Whilst drawing upon the idea of theatre as a 'seeing-place', the spectacularisation of the body and of theatricality in feminist performance art dislocates performance from the logocentric theatrical model. In this way, the performer's auratic body can be seen to be used in contradictory terms, moving between presence and absence, theatrical illusion and materiality. Theatre, then, is a historical discourse that has been drawn upon in the feminist deconstruction of representational standards. However, theatre as such has been displaced by a turn to theatricality in feminist performance art in particular.

Feminist performance artists attempt to destabilise the privilege of the phallogocentric subject and the skin of *one*, so to speak, by working with the body as site and locus of language, sight and desire. However, the performance artists that I have included in this study do not attempt to recuperate an essential feminine morphological imaginary or expressive form that is located *in* the body. Rather, they *transgress* the interface of skin and the divisions between subject and object, object and abject, as an assertion of cultural agency. It has been seen that by using the sexually specific female body as the site of performance resonates deeply with cultural fears and fantasies about the female body and particularly as the site of rejection in the formation of the subject and entry into the symbolic. The re-presentation of the body in feminist performance art dislodges the maternal from its antagonistic and silent position in opposition to the phallus and, I conclude, contributes to the production of a fluid morphological imaginary envisioned variously by Irigaray, Kristeva and Butler in particular. As an area for further study, this morphological imaginary could be seen to be modelled in terms of a spiral rather than a continuum, destabilising radically the mastering divisions between male and female. The notion of a spiral form could, I think, be a useful model for future research because it offers a way of envisioning the subject as in process without being 'lost' in the problematic 'space-off' of the other. As such, my analyses of feminist performance art are generally outmoded, for the artists discussed are in effect moving into this paradigm, working between figuration and disfiguration, or being and becoming.

The temporary assumption of the position 'woman' and the reinterpretation of that signifier points towards a broader feminist project. That is, the post-phallic subject enables us to begin thinking of 'identity' as a location: temporary, mobile, multiple, fluid and communal rather than as fixed, indivisible, phallic and individualistic. Perhaps the 'broader feminist project' mentioned above could be reconfigured as a *post-feminist* project in which the aforementioned mastering division between male and female is decentred with the effect that these categories no longer function in dualistic opposition. Post-feminism, post-humanism and the post-human are discourses that could be used to construct an analytical framework that envisions a space-time wherein hierarchical distinctions between human, machine and animal are indiscrete and the body is racially and sexually ambiguous. In these terms, I am looking towards the curved surface of a possible future, and so I would suggest that this requires further research. In the specific field of performance art, this kind of research could focus upon interventions and manipulations of robotics, for example in the work of Stelarc, as well as performances that exploit biomedical and/or digital imaging technology, such as *Critical Art Ensemble* (Schneider 2000). Orlan's use of technology remains open to further study in this regard as the body and state of the art technology are met in her flesh.

The idea of a 'post-phallic' and 'post-feminist' subject indicates, I think, that there are representational possibilities available to 'the other' who, as has been shown, is excluded from canonical structures except as a supportive, spatialised object. That is, the post-phallic subject moves beyond the pre-Oedipal and a 'primitive' or 'savage' aesthetic. Here again it can be seen that the performance artists discussed in this thesis work with contradiction, for they use the body, with its associations with base desire and instability, in order to intervene in the rational order of *logos*. This in effect shows up the radical dependence of phallogocentrism upon the manipulation and control of the flesh and the female body in particular and indicates that the structures of dominance and repression that have secured the edifice of patriarchy can be transgressed in terms of the soft tool of flesh.

## Bibliography

Aaiten, J. 1997. 'Performing the body, creating culture', in: Davis, K. ed. *Embodied Practices: Feminist Perspectives on the Body*. London: Sage, 41-72.

Abbinett, R. 2003. *Culture and Identity: Critical Theories*. New Delhi: Sage.

Adams, P. 1996. *The Emptiness of the Image: Psychoanalysis and sexual differences*. London and New York: Routledge.

Ahmed, S. and Stacey, J. eds. 2001. *Thinking through the skin*. London: Routledge.

Alberro, A. 2004. 'Beauty Knows No Pain'. *Art Journal*. 63(2), 36-43.

Anderlini-D'Onofrio, S. 1999. 'Is Feminism Realism Possible? A Theory of Labial mimesis'. *Journal of Gender Studies*. 8(2), 159-18.

Arnason, H.H. 1986. *A History of Modern Art*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Arnfred, S. 2004. *Rethinking Sexualities in Africa*. Sweden: Almqvist and Wiksell.

Artaud, A. trans. Corti, V. 1970. *The Theatre and Its Double*. London: Calder and Boyers.

Artaud, A. 1976. 'To Have Done with the Judgement of God', in: Artaud, A. trans Weaver, H. *Antonin Artaud: selected writings*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 555-576.

Arthurs, J. and Grimshaw, J. eds. 1999. *Women's Bodies: Discipline and Transgression*. London: Cassell.

Arthurs, J. 1999. 'Revolting Women: the Body in comic performance', in: Arthurs, J and Grimshaw, J eds. *Women's Bodies: Discipline and Transgression*. London: Cassell, 137-164.

Augsburg, T. 1998. 'Orlan's Performative Transformations of Subjectivity', in: Phelan and Lane eds. *The Ends of Performance*. New York: New York University Press, 285-327.

Auslander, P. 1997. *From acting to performance: essays in modernism and postmodernism*. London: Routledge.

Auslander, P. 1999. *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. London: Routledge.

Austin, G. 1990. *Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

Ayers, R. 2000. 'Serene and Happy and Distant: an interview with Orlan', in: Featherstone ed. *Body Modification*. London: Sage, 171-184.

Bakhtin, M. trans. Helene Iswolsky. 1965. *Rabelais and His World*. Massachusetts and London: MIT Press.

Barker, E. 1998. *Contemporary Cultures of Display*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Bartky, S. 1988. 'Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernisation of Patriarchal Power', in: Diamond, I. and Quinby, L. eds: *Feminism and Foucault: reflections on Resistance*. Boston: Northeastern University Review, 61-86.

Bester, R. 2003. 'Floating Free', in: Searle, B. *Float (exhibition catalogue for Standard Bank Young Artist 2003)* Cape Town: Bell Roberts Publishing, 7-55.

Bleeker, M. 1999. 'Death, Digitalisation and Dys-appearance: Staging the Body of Science', in: *Performance Research: On Line*. 4(2), 1-7.

Blistene, B., Heartney, E., Le Bon, L., Obriso H.V., Rehberg, V. and Zugazagoita, J. btrans Dusinberre, D. 2004. *ORLAN: Carnal Art*. Paris: Flammarion.

Bosch, M. 2005. 'Limping into the African Renaissance: the Abject Art of Steven Cohen'. *South African Theatre Journal*. 19, 116-129.

Boys, J. 1999. 'Positions in the Landscape: gender, space and the 'nature of virtual reality', in: Cutting Edge: the Women's Research Group eds. 1999. *Desire by Design: Body Territories and New Technologies*. New York: LB. Taurus Publishers, 187-203.

Braidotti, R. 1999. 'Signs of Wonder and Traces of Doubt: on Teratology and Embodied Differences', in: Price and Shildrick eds. *Feminist theory and the Body*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 290-300.

Brantlinger, P. 1985-6. 'Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent'. *Critical Inquiry*. 12, 166-203.

Broadhurst, S. 1999. *Liminal Acts: A Critical Overview of Contemporary Performance Theory*. London: Cassell.

Brook-Rose, C. 1986. 'Woman as semiotic object', in: Ruben-Suleiman, S. ed. 1986. *The Female Body in Western Culture*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Brooks, A. 1997. *Postfeminisms: Feminism, Cultural Theory and Cultural Forms*. London: Routledge.

Brown, J. and McClen Novick with Sprinkle, A. 1995. 'Interview with Annie Sprinkle', in: *Voices from the Edge*. <http://www.AnnieSprinkle.org/html/about/voices.html> (8/01/06).

O'Bryan, C.J. 2005. *Carnal Art: Orlan's Refacing*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Bulbeck, C. 1998. *Re-Orienting Western Feminisms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Butler, J. 1990a. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Gender*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. 1990b. 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theatre', in: Case, S. ed. *Performing Feminisms*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 270-282.
- Butler, J. 1993. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. London: Routledge.
- Butler, J. and Salih, S. eds 2004. *The Judith Butler Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Campbell, J. 2000. *Arguing with the Phallus: feminist, queer and postcolonial theory: a psychoanalytic contribution*. London and New York: Zed Books.
- Campbell, P and Spackman, H. 1998. 'With/out an Anaesthetic: The Terrible Beauty of Franko B'. *The Drama Review*. 42(2), 56-66.
- Caputi, M. 1996. 'Identity and Non-Identity in Aesthetic Theory'. *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*. 8(3): 128-147.
- Carlson, M. 1996. *Performance: A Critical Introduction*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Case, S. ed.1990. *Performing Feminisms*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Chaplin, E. 1994. *Sociology and Visual Representation*. London: Routledge.
- Chisholm, D. 1995. 'The cunning lingua of desire: Bodies, language, and perverse performativity', in: Grosz, E. and Probyn, E. 1995. *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism*. London and New York: Routledge, 19-34.

- Clarke, J. 2000. 'The Sacrificial Body of Orlan', in: Featherstone, M. ed. *Body Modification*. London: Sage, 185-207.
- Clifford, J and Marcus, G.E. eds. 1986. *Writing Culture: the Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. London: University of California Press.
- Connor, S. 2001. 'Mortification', in Ahmed, S. and Stacey, J eds. *Thinking through the skin*. London: Routledge, 36-5.
- Cormican, M. 2003. 'Pro-Porn Rhetoric and the Cinema of Monika Treut'. *Women in German Yearbook*. 19, 179-199.
- Creed, B. 1995. 'Lesbian Bodies: Tribades, tomboys and tarts', in Grosz, E. and Probyn, E. *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism*. London and New York: Routledge, 86-103.
- Cros, C, Le Bon, L. and Rehberg, V. 2004. 'Chronophotology', in Blistene *et al.* *ORLAN*. Paris: Flammarion.
- Curtis, N. 2000. 'The Body as Outlaw: Lyotard, Kafka and the Visible Human Project', in Featherstone ed. *Body Modification*. London: Sage, 249-317.
- Cutting Edge: The Women's Research Group eds. 1999. *Desire by Design: Body Territories and New Technologies*. New York: LB. Taurus Publishers.
- De Kock, L, Bethlehem, L. and Laden, S eds. 2004. *South Africa in the Global Imaginary*. Unisa, South Africa: Unisa Press.
- Davis, K. 1997. *Embodied Practices: Feminist Perspectives on the Body*. London: Sage.
- Diamond, E. ed. 1996. *Performance and Cultural Politics*. London: Routledge.
- Diamond, E. 1997. *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and Theatre*. London and New York: Routledge.

Diamond, I. 1980. 'Pornography and Repression: a Reconsideration of 'who' and 'what'', in Lederer, L. ed. *Take Back the Night: Women on Pornography*. New York: St Martin's Press, 187-203.

Dillenburg, L. 2004. 'A Reflection on the Cultural Meanings of Female Circumcision', in Arnfred, S. *Rethinking Sexualities in Africa*. Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 88-149.

Doane, MA. 2004. 'Aesthetics and Politics'. *SIGNS: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 30(1), 1229-1235.

Dolan, J. 1988. *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*. Michigan: UMI Research Press.

Dolan, J. 2001. *Geographies of Learning: Theory and Practice, Activism and Performance*. Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press.

Evans, H. 1979. *The Oldest Profession in the Business: An Illustrated History of Prostitution*. London: David and Charles.

Faber, A. 2002. 'Saint Orlan: Ritual as Violent Spectacle and Cultural Criticism'. *The Drama Review*. 46( 1), 85-92.

Fabian, J. 2004. *Ethnography and Performance*. Unpublished seminar, Presented at University of KwaZulu Natal, 23/03/04.

Featherstone, M. ed. 2000. *Body Modification*. London: Sage.

Ford, Dr. C. 2005. *Issues of Consequence: Why do I scream at God for the Rape of Babies*. Unpublished lecture at the National Arts Festival Winter School. Grahamstown, 2/07/05.

Forte, J. 1990. 'Women's Performance Art: Feminism and Postmodernism', in Case, S. ed. *Performing Feminisms*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

- Fortier, M. 1997. *Theory/Theatre: An Introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Foster, S.L. 1995. *Choreographing History*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Foucault, M. trans Hurley, R. 1976. *The History of Sexuality: Volume One*. New York: Vintage.
- Foucault, M. trans. Sheridan, A. 1977. *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*. London: Penguin.
- Freedman, B. 1990. 'Framing up: Feminism, psychoanalysis, theatre' in: Case ed.1990. *Performing Feminisms*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 54-76.
- Fuchs, E. 1989. 'Staging the Obscene'. *The Drama Review*. 33(1) 33-58.
- Gaard, G. ed. 1993. *ECOFEMINISM: Women, Animals, Nature*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Gallop, J. 1988. *Thinking Through the Body*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Garner, S.B. 1994. *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Garoain, C. 1999. *Performing Pedagogy: Towards an Art of politics*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Gilman, S.L. 1985. 'Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth Century Art, Medicine and Literature'. *Critical Inquiry*. 12 (Autumn), 204-242.
- Goldberg, R. 1998. *Performance Art: Live Art Since the 1960s*. Singapore: Thames and Hudson.
- Golding, S. ed. 1997. *The eight technologies of otherness*. New York: Routledge.

- Golding, S. 1997. 'Curiosity', in Golding, S. ed. *The eight technologies of otherness*. New York: Routledge, 7-26.
- Goodman, L. with de Gay, J. 1998. *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance*. Routledge: London and New York.
- Griggs, C. 1999. *S/he: Changing Sex and Changing Clothes*. New York: Berg.
- Grosz, E. 1995. *Space, Time and Perversion*. London: Routledge.
- Grosz, E. and Probyn, E. 1995. *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Guerilla Girls, The. 1998. *The Guerilla Girls' Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art*. New York: Penguin.
- Halberstan, J. and Livingstone, I. 1995. *Posthuman Bodies*. United States: University of Indiana Press.
- Hammers, C. and Brown III, A.D. 2004. 'Towards a Feminist-Queer Alliance: a paradigmatic shift in the research process'. *Social Epistemology*. 18(1), 85-10.
- Haraway, D.J. 1991. *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: the Reinvention of Nature*. London: Free Association Books.
- Hart, L. and Phelan, P. 1993. *Acting Out: Feminist Performances*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Harwood, V., Oswel, D., Parkinson, K., and Ward, A. eds. 1993. *Pleasure Principles: Politics, Sexuality and Ethics*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Harradine, D. 2000. 'Object Identities and Fluid Performances: Theorising the Leaking Body'. *Contemporary Theatre Review*. 10(3), 69-78.

Harvey, P. and Gow, P. eds. 1994. *Sex and Violence: issues in representation and experience*. London: Routledge.

Hassen, E.K. 2004. 'The BEE-hive swarm if you've got the money honey...'. *SA Labour Bulletin*. 28(3), 22-27.

Haver, W. 1997. 'Queer Research, or, how to practise invention to the brink of intelligibility', in Golding, S. ed. *The eight technologies of otherness*. London: Routledge, 277-292.

Hirdman, A. 2004. 'Mirrored Masculinity? Turning the Perspective of Sexualisation and Representation Around'. *NIKK Magasin*. 3(*The Sexualisation of Public Space*), 8-11.

Hirschhorn, M. 1996. 'Orlan: Artist in the post-human age of mechanical incarnations: body as ready to be re-made', in: Pollock, G. ed: *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*. London: Routledge. 15-35

Holledge, J. and Tompkins, J. 2000. *Women's Intercultural Performance*. London: Routledge.

Houppert, K. 1999. *The Curse: Confronting the Last Taboo*. London: Profile Books.

Hubbard, R., Heinefin, M.S. and Fried, B. 1982. *Biological Woman: the Convenient Myth*. Vermont: Schenkman Books.

lies, C. 1995. *Marina Abramovic: objects, video, performance, sound*. Stuttgart: Staib and Mayre.

Ince, K. 2000. *Orlan: Millennial Female*. Oxford: Berg.

Irigaray, L. 1981. 'When the Goods Get Together', in: Marks and Courtiviron, eds. *New French Feminisms: an Anthology*. Harvester. London.

- Irigaray, L. 1985a. *Speculum of the Other Woman*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Irigaray, L. trans. Porter, C. with Burke, C. 1985b. *This Sex Which is Not One*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Irigaray, L. 1986. 'Women, the Sacred and Money'. *Paragraph: the Journal of Modern Critical Theory Group*. *^(Feminism)*, 6-18.
- Irigaray, L. 1991. *The Irigaray Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Irigaray, L. trans Martin, A. 1993. *Je, tu, nous: Towards a Culture of Difference*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Irigaray, L. trans Pluhacek, S. 2002. *Between east and west: from Singularity to Community*. United States: Columbia University Press.
- Isaak, J.A. 1996. *Feminism and Contemporary Art: the Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter*. London: Routledge.
- Jamal, A. 2002. *Predicaments of Culture in South Africa*. Unpublished PhD: University of Natal.
- Jamal, A. 2004. *The bearable lightness of Tracy Rose's 'The Kiss'*. <http://www.chimurenga.co.za/modules.php?name=News&file> (6/08/2006) (unpaginated).
- Jones, A. and Stephenson, A. 1999. *Performing the Body/Performing the Text*. London: Routledge.
- Kaite, B. 1995. *Pornography and Difference*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Kauffman, L.S. 1998. *Bad Girls and Sick Boys: Fantasies in Contemporary Art and Culture*. California: University of California Press.

Kaye, N. 2000. *Site Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation*. London: Routledge

Keegan, T. 2001. 'Gender, Degeneration and Sexual Danger: Imagining Race and Class in South Africa, ca 1912'. *Journal of Southern African Studies*. 27(3), 459-477.

Kley, E. 2002. 'Mystical Cosmetics: Oliver Herring, Stephen Dean, Berni Searle'. *Performing Arts Journal*. 24(3),101-104.

Kristeva, J. trans. Rondiez, L.S. 1982. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Kristeva, J. trans Waller, M . 1984. *Revolution in Poetic Language*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Kristeva, J. trans Rondiez, L.S. 1993. *Nations Without Nationalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Kristeva, J. 1986. 'Stabat Mater', in: Ruben-Suleiman, S. ed. *The Female Body in Western Culture*. . Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Kroker, A. and Cook, D. eds. 1991. *The Postmodern Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics*. London: Macmillan.

De Lauretis, T. 1986. *Feminist Studies, Critical Studies*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Leclerc-Madlala, S. 2001. 'Virginity Testing: Managing Sexuality in a Maturing HIV/Aids Epidemic'. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*. 15(4), 522-533.

Lederer, L. ed. 1980. *Take Back the Night: Women on Pornography*. New York: St Martin's Press.

- Lewis, R. and Mills, S. eds. 2003. *Feminist Postcolonial Theory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Lindfors, B. 1999. *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business*. Bloomington and Claremont: Indiana University Press and David Philip.
- Loomba, A. 2005. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. Oxon and New York: Routledge.
- Loots, L. 1995. 'Colonised Bodies: Overcoming Gender Construction of Bodies in Dance Movement Education'. *Women, the Arts and South Africa: Conference Proceedings*. 1 (26-28 January 1995). Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal, pages unknown.
- Mack, R. 2003. 'Heteroqueer ladies: Some performative transactions between gay men and heterosexual women'. *Feminist Review*. 73 (*Identities*), 21-37.
- Mackenny, V. 2001. 'Post Apartheid Performance Art as a Site of Gender Resistance'. *AGENDA: empowering women for gender equity*. (2) 49, 15-24.
- Madeline, L. and Martin, M. eds. 2006. *Picasso and Africa*. Cape Town: Bell Roberts Publishing.
- Massey, D. 1994. *Space, Place and Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Massey, D. 'Spatial Disruptions', in Golding, S. ed. *The eight technologies of otherness*. New York: Routledge, 217-224.
- Mattick, P. 1995. 'Beautiful and Sublime: Gender totemism in the constitution of Gender', in: Zeglin Brand, P and Korsmeyer, C. 1995. *Feminism and Tradition in Aesthetics*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 27-48.
- McDowell, L. 1999. *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- McElroy, W. 1995. *XXX: A Woman's Right to Pornography*. New York: St Martin's Press.
- Meskimmon, M. 2003. *Women Making Art: History, Subjectivity, Aesthetics*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Miglietti, F. 2003. *Extreme Bodies: the Use and Abuse of the Body in Art*. Milano: Skira.
- Talpade Mohanty, C. 2003. 'Under western eyes: feminist scholarship and colonial discourses', in: Lewis, R. and Mills, S. eds. *Feminist Postcolonial Theory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 49-74.
- Montano, L. 1989. 'Summer Saint Camp 1987 with Annie Sprinkle and Veronica Vera'. *The Drama Review*. 33(1), 94-103.
- Moos, D. 1996. 'Memories of Being: Orlan's Theatre of Self'. *Art and Text*. 54, 67-72.
- Moser, M. 1999. ' 'Have You Been Saved?' Models of Identity for Maladies of the Soul: Evangelism and Feminist Performance Art'. *Journal of American Culture*. 22(4), 57-68.
- Muririk, T. with Rose, T. 2004. 'The Gospel of Tracey Rose'. *Art South Africa*. 1(4), 30-36.
- Murray, S. ed. 1997. *Not on Any Map: Essays on Postcoloniality and Cultural Nationalism*. Devon: University of Exeter Press.
- O'Brist, U. 2004. 'Orlan Interviewed', in Blistene *et al.* *ORLAN*. Paris: Flammarion, 187-204.
- O'Dell, K. 1998. *Masochism, Performance Art and the 1970's*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Oesland, J. 1999. 'A Goddess Unbound'. *American Theatre*. 16(3), 24-27.

- O'Neill, M. 2001. *Prostitution and Feminism: Towards a Politics of Feeling*. United Kingdom: Polity.
- Orlan. 1998. 'Intervention' in: Phelan, P. and Lane, J. eds: *The Ends of Performance*. New York New York University Press, 315-327.
- Orlan. 2004. 'Anthology', in Blistene *et al.* *ORLAN*. Paris: Flammarion, 184-186.
- Orlan: *Carnal Art*. [http://www.dundee.ac.uk/transcript/volume2/issue2\\_2/orlan/orlan.htm](http://www.dundee.ac.uk/transcript/volume2/issue2_2/orlan/orlan.htm) (24/08/03)
- Osha, S. 2004. 'Unravelling the Silences of Black Sexualities'. *AGENDA: empowering women for gender equity*. 2(63), 92-98.
- Owens, C. ed. 1992. *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power and Culture*. Oxford: University of California Press.
- Pacteau, F. 1994. *The Symptom of Beauty*. London: Reaktion.
- Parker, A. and Kosofsky-Sedgwick, E. eds. 1995. *Performativity and Performance*. New York: Routledge.
- Pelias, R.J. 1999. *Writing Performance: Poeticising the Researcher's Body*. Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Pelmer, J. 2006. 'Breast Stroke: the tit prints of Annie Sprinkle', (unpaginated). <http://www.anniesprinkle.org/lectures/tit-demo.html> (13/01/06)
- Perlmutter, D. 2000. 'The Sacrificial Aesthetic: Blood Rituals from Art to Murder'. *Anthropoetics*. 5(2). (unpaginated). <http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap0502/blood.htm> (18/10/06)

- Perry, G. ed. 2004. *Difference and Excess in Contemporary Art: The Visibility of Women's Practice*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Phelan, P. 1993. *Unmarked: the Politics of Performance*. London: Routledge.
- Phelan, P. and Lane, J. eds. 1998. *The Ends of Performance*. New York: New York University Press.
- Phillips, K. M. and Reay, B. eds. 2002. *Sexualities in History: A Reader*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Pidoux, J.E. and Jost, M. 2005. 'Marching to a Different Tune: Social and Political Aspects of Performance Art'. *PASSAGES: The Cultural Magazine of Pro Helvetia*. 38 (*Choreographing Life: Metamorphoses of Dance*), 42-47.
- Pitts, V. 2003. *In the flesh: the cultural politics of body modification*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pollock, G. 1999. *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories*. London: Routledge.
- Price, J. and Shildrick, M. eds. 1999. *Feminism and the Body*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Pritchard, A. 1992. 'Antigone's Mirrors: Reflections on Moral Madness'. *Hypatia*. 7(3) 77-92.
- Probyn, E. 2001. 'Eating Skin', in Ahmed, S. and Stacey, J. eds. *Thinking through the Skin*. London: Routledge, 87-103.
- Randall, H. and Polhemus, T. 2000. *The Customised Body*. London: Serpant's Tale.
- Ratelo, K. 2004. 'Kinky Politics', in Arnfred, S. ed. *Rethinking Sexualities in Africa*. Sweden : Almqvist and Wiksell, 59-74.

- Reddy, T. 2000. *Hegemony and Resistance: Contesting Identities in South Africa*. United Kingdom and United States: Ashgate.
- Reddy, V. and Butler, J. 2004. 'Troubling Genders, Subverting Identities: Interview with Judith Butler'. *AGENDA: empowering women for gender equity*. 2(1), 115-123.
- Roach, J. 1995. 'Culture and Performance in the circum-Atlantic world', in: Parker, A. and Kosofsky-Sedgwick, E. eds. *Performativity and Performance*. New York: Routledge, 45-63.
- Rose, B. 1993. 'Is it Art? Orlan and the Transgressive Act'. *Art in America*. No 81 (Feb), 82-87.
- Rose, T: *Jesus Christ, a woman*. Tracey Rose, video artist  
(<http://www.africultures.com/anglais/articles-anglais/40.rose.html>) (5/08/06).
- Ruben-Suleiman, S. ed. 1986. *The Female Body in Western Culture*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Sandford, M.R. 1995. *Happenings and Other Acts*. London: Routledge.
- Sarakinsky, M. 1995. 'Erotica vs Pornography: A Question of Power (or 'the Phallus of Power)', in: Doepl, R. and Bertoldi, A. eds. *The Mechanisms of Power: 11' Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians, July 1995*. 143-152.
- Sassyn, R. 2006. 'The RUDE-iments of Art. *The Natal Witness*. January 14, pi7.
- Sawicki, J. 1991. *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power and the Body*. New York: Routledge.
- Schmahmann, B. 2004. *Through the Looking Glass: Representations of Self by South African Women Artists*. Johannesburg: David Krut Publishing.

- Schneider, R. 1997. *The Explicit Body in Performance*. London: Routledge.
- Schneider, R. 2000. 'Nomadmedia: on Critical Art Ensemble'. *The Drama Review*. 4(44), 120-132.
- Scholes, R. 1982. *Semiotics and Interpretation*. New York: Vail Balou Press.
- Scolnicov, H. 1994. *Women's Theatrical Space*. Great Britain: Cambridge University Press.
- Segal, L. 1999. 'Body Matters: Cultural Inscriptions' in Price, J. and Shildrick, M. eds. 1999. *Feminist theory and the Body*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 105-110.
- Sey, J. and Smith, K. 1998. 'Cyborg Culture and the Politics of Visual Transgression', in: *Negotiating Identities: Proceedings of the 14' annual conference of the South African Association of Art Historians*. 15-17 July, 104-108.
- Shildrick, M. 1997. *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries: Feminism, Postmodernism and (Bio)Ethics*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Shildrick, M. 2001. 'You are there, like my own skin': refiguring relational economies', in: Ahmed, S. and Stacey, J. eds. *Thinking through the skin*. London: Routledge, 160-173.
- Soble, A. 2002. *Pornography, Sex and Feminism*. New York. Prometheus Books.
- Sobopha, M. 2005. 'The body: gender and the politics of representation'. *AGENDA: empowering women for gender equity*. 63(2005), 117-130.
- Solomon, A. 1997. *Re-Dressing the Canon: Essays on Theatre and Gender*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Sonser-Breen, M. and Blumenfield, W.J. eds. 2005. *Why Butler Matters: Judith Butler's Impact on Feminist and Queer Studies*. Hampshire and Burlington: Ashgate.

- Spivak, G. 1999. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. United States: Harvard University Press.
- Sprinkle, A. 1994. *Post Porn Modernist*, [www.bobsart.org](http://www.bobsart.org) (unpaginated) (13/01/06)
- Sprinkle, A. ed. Cody, G .2001. *Hardcore from the Heart: the pleasures, profits and politics of sex in performance*. London: Continuum.
- Sprinkle, A. 1997. *My Twenty Five Years as a Multimedia Whore*. New York: Cleis Press.
- Sprinkle, A. *Annie Sprinkle Home Page*, <http://www.anniesprinkle.org/html> (13/01/06)
- Sprinkle, A. *Seven Years of Love as Art*. <http://loveartlab.org> (8/01/06).
- Spreen, C. 2003. 'Resisting the Plague: the French Reactionary Right and Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty'. *Modern Language Quarterly*. 1(64), 71-96.
- Spurr, A. 1993. *The Rhetoric of Empire: colonial discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*. London: Duke University Press.
- Strother, Z.S. 1999. 'Display of the Body Hottentot', in Lindfors, B. ed. *Africans on Stage: studies in Ethnological Show Business*. Bloomington and Claremont: Indiana University Press and David Philip, 1-6.
- Tait, P. 2000. *Body Show/s: Australian Views of Live Performance*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Taylor, L. and Willis, A. 1999. *Media Studies: Texts, Institutions and Audiences*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Terry, J. and Urla, J. eds. 1995. *Deviant Bodies: Critical Perspectives on Difference in Science and Popular Culture*. United States: Indiana University Press.

Tseelon, E. ed. 2001. *Masquerade and Identities: Essays on Gender, Sexuality and Marginality*. London: Routledge.

Tseelon, E. 2001. 'On women and clothes and carnival fools', in: Tseelon, E. ed. *Masquerade and Identities: Essays on Gender, Sexuality and Marginality*. London: Routledge, 153-173.

Tyler, I. 2001. 'Skin tight: celebrity, pregnancy and subjectivity', in Ahmed, S and Stacey, J. eds. *Thinking through the skin*. London: Routledge, 69-83.

Vanska, A. 2002. 'A heroic male and a beautiful woman. Temu Maki, Orlan and the ambivalence of the grotesque body'. *NORA*. 10(3), 154-167.

Vergine, L. 2000. *Body Art and Performance: The Body as Language*. Milano: Skira.

Wallach Scott, J. ed. 1996. *Feminism and History*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Walkerdine, V., Lucey, H. and Melody, J. 2001. *Growing Up Girl: Psychological Explorations of Gender and Class*. Hampshire: Palgrave.

Van Der Watt, L. 2004. 'Tracing: Berni Searle'. *African Arts*. Winter 2004, unpaginated. <http://www.findarticles.com> (6/08/2006)

Weedon, C. 1997. *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. Massachusetts: Blackwell.

Williams, L. 1989. *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the Frenzy of the Visible*. California: University of California Press.

Williams, R. 1997. 'Dominant, Residual, and Emergent', in: *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 121-7.

Williamson, S. 2001. Tracey Rose'. *Artthroh*. 43 (March 2001), unpaginated.  
<http://www.artthrob.co.za> (5/06/2006)

Williamson, S. 2001. 'Juncture at the Granary'. *Artthroh*. 42(Feb 2001), unpaginated.  
<http://www.artthrob.co.za> (5/06/2006)

Willis, S. 1990. 'Cixous' *Portrait de Dora*: the unseen and the un-scene', in: Case, S. ed.  
*Performing Feminisms*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 77-91.

Wilson, F. and Fredriksen, B.F. eds. 1995. *Ethnicity, Gender and the Subversion of Nationalism*. London: Frank Cass and Co.

Wilton, T. 1999. 'Temporality, materiality: Towards a body in time', in: Arthurs, J. and Grimshaw, J. eds. *Women's Bodies: Discipline and Transgression*. London: Cassell, 48-66.

Winders, J.A. 1991. *Gender, Theory and the Canon*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press.

Wiss, R. 1994. 'Lipreading: Remembering Saartjie Baartman- !Kung tribeswoman put on display in England in 1810- Women's Difference: Sexuality and Maternity in Colonial and Postcolonial Discourses'. *Australian Journal of Anthropology*. 1994(Winter/Spring), unpaginated. <http://www.findarticles.com> (4/9/2006)

Vergine, L. 2000. *Body Art and Performance: the Body as Language*. Milano: Skira.

Zeglin Brand, P. and Korsmeyer, C. 1995. *Feminism and Tradition in Aesthetics*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press.

Zeglin Brand, P. 1995. 'Revising the Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic distinction: the Aesthetic Value of Activist Art', in: Zeglin Brand and Korsmeyer eds. *Feminism and Tradition in Aesthetics*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 245-272.

Zurbrugg, N. 2000. 'Marinetti, Chopin, Stelarc and the auratic intensities of the postmodern techno-body', in Featherstone, M. ed. London: Sage, 93-116.

### **Exhibitions**

*Second to None: Celebrating 50 Years of Women's Struggle* (July 2006) South African National Gallery. Cape Town.

*Tracey Rose: Ciao Bella* (July 2001) Monument Gallery, National Arts Festival. Grahamstown.