Ghostly Subjects: Towards a Cultural Analysis of the Abjected Self

by

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GHOSTLY SUBJECTS: TOWARDS A CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE ABJECTED SELF

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This thesis is concerned with what ruptures the body, renders it inarticulate and meaningless, and the body’s forceful desire to reassert itself against this encroaching terror. The process of abjection elicits a breakdown in the subject which leads to a sense of indeterminateness. I consider this indeterminateness “ghostly” since it highlights both an aporetic ontology that exists between binary categories and carries with it the sense of “haunting” that always bespeaks the violence of abjection. The subjects that are analyzed in this thesis evoke the pain of separation, the loneliness of isolation, the ontological murkiness which elicits a sense of estrangement from the self, and the way the abject is construed as something grotesque which must be warded off in order to keep the cultural body intact.
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INTRODUCTION

Tove Jansson’s *The Moomins* first ignited the spark for this thesis. Last fall, as I was browsing through the beloved Finnish writer/illustrator’s series of an anthropomorphized hippo family, I was struck by the image of a new character introduced: Ninny, “the invisible child”. Following the cruel austerity of her guardian, Ninny begins to “fade around the edges” (Jansson 110) until she becomes completely transparent. When she is rescued and brought to the Moomin home one dark and stormy night, her entrance is solely emphasized by the “hesitant” chime of a bell dangling at the end of a ribbon — presumably tied around the young girl’s neck. The illustrations of Ninny are arresting in the short story collection *Tales from Moominvalley*; depicted as a bodiless Victorian dress and floating hair bow, her invisibility is presented as kind of uncanny spectacle. After all, if invisibility is, by its very definition, something which “cannot be seen” (OED), then Jansson’s purposeful disembodiment of Ninny is a transgressive literalization of that which should be kept unseeable — or unknowable, since knowledge and sight are so often interchangeable. Jansson makes visible the “burden of pain” or the articulation of a pain that should be kept hidden — what Sianne Ngai claims Herman Melville’s Bartleby of *Bartleby the Scrivener* attempts through his disengagement from work and eventually, all matters pertaining to maintaining his existence, making the intolerable life of the firm a “social invisibility [that] paradoxically [becomes] visible” (333). The pain that is articulated is often unsavoury, foul: consider the moralistic outcry against those who self-harm, bloodily transcribing their pain on flesh, or the anorexic whose starvation isn’t registered as perverse until it becomes pronounced on the body and obfuscates the boundaries between human and corpse.
Slavoj Žižek views the skin of the “cutter” as the very limen between the Lacanian “real” and the “imaginary” (10); in Canada, a patient with an eating disorder is only considered admissible to hospital — i.e., a medicalized body with a treatable ailment — under the physical/somatic aegis of a malnutrition diagnosis.

The burden of pain serves as a signification of the cultural body’s (which for this thesis will be the primary way I construe the general public, as one functioning, self-automated body) rejection of one of its ‘parts’; an expulsion of the abject, which Julia Kristeva defines as something which “might have been [familiar] in an opaque and forgotten life” but has now become “radically separate, loathsome” (2). The interrogative and confrontational nature of the abject goes hand in hand with what will be the prime focus of my thesis: fear, for it is fear that precedes the revulsive gag that forcibly expels the abject. Fear is what Kristeva notes colours everything in a “ghostly glimmer” (6); it is also thought to be an instinctual reaction, largely unmediated by the brain. Therefore, to respond viscerally when one encounters the abject is nothing short of expected, and the subsequent excision, containment, suppression, and eradication are construed as logical outgrowths of that fear. It is a fear of disruption, of the transgression of the clearly defined borders I/Other, subject/object, inside/outside. The abject is able to slither past the so-called impenetrable wall of meaning, puncturing it and thereby threatening its very foundation and architecture.

To return to Kristeva’s assertion of “ghostliness” that the abject inspires, I aim to consider the indelible mark of invisibility that accompanies abjection. Jansson makes that invisibility inarguable with Ninny, whose profound pain has manifested itself into a literal ghostly existence. Ninny, in her aestheticized form, depicts the reality of the abject
as the invisible ghostified subject. Invisibility, in many ways, is an inurement so intermingled with abjection it seems almost tautological to consider them separate. Is “fading around the edges” not an inevitability of the one who has been cast out/forsaken/decimated/destroyed? To rephrase this: might we not (re)consider the goal of abjection as to evoke a sense of disintegrity in the subject so that the certainty of their existence begins to feel both murky and understated. Consider the poet Essex Hemphill's words in his monumental speech “On the Shores of Cyberspace”. In it he muses whether the advent of the digital age would signify a new space of belonging for all the “invisible men”: could the internet house all of their pain and trauma? Or would cyberspace prove to be a reinscription of the world that expelled him:

I was counting T-cells on the shores of cyberspace and feeling some despair… I have miscegenated and mutated, tolerated and assimilated, and yet, I remain the same in eyes of those who would fear and despise me. I stand at the threshold of cyberspace and wonder, is it possible that I am unwelcome here too? Will I be allowed to construct a virtual reality that empowers me? Can invisible men see their own reflections? I'm carrying trauma into cyberspace – violent gestures, a fractured soul, short fuses, dreams of revenge…My primary public characteristics continue to be defined by dreads of me, myths about me and plain old homegrown contempt. All of this confusion is accompanying me into cyberspace; every indignity and humiliation, every anger and suspicion. (qtd. in Christina Sharpe 1089)

Hemphill articulates a kind of Agambenian existence where one, reduced to bare life, possesses a marginality that cannot be incorporated. The subject is prescribed to
undergo a metamorphosis (more aptly an anamorphosis) that can assuage all ontological anxieties. Hemphill uses T-cells\(^1\) as a marker of the eroding self — not simply in the somatic sense that constitutes a weakening immune system (he mentions penning the famous poem “Vital Signs” after being informed of his extremely low T-cell count, a complication of AIDS) but also in a comprehensive manner that envisions all of the tactical violence imparted by the cultural body as ways to diminish the self. In Hemphill’s world, T-cells are sprinkled like dust at every site of trauma: “in [so many] places that I am forgetting to make room for other memories” (qtd in Rodney McKenzie Jr.) All of these things fester and have an empirical wear on the body; (no)thing escapes unscathed.

Self-erosion is, in part, a disappearing act: an ontological erosion that mediates the reification of the subject’s invisibility. Hemphill’s self-erosion would be described by Calvin Warren as *onticidal*\(^2\) — the “Symbolic death” that predates “physical demise” (12). Onticide is the doubly death of the one who is already assumed to be dead. An existence underscored by a non-existence, or, as Alain Badiou aptly refers to it, an “‘inexistent existence’” where the very notion of existence “is so inconceivable that it becomes somewhat ‘speculative,’ or purely conceptual” (qtd in Warren 12). The degree of one’s existence is so minimal that it cannot even be approximated. Warren notes that this non-ontology is necessary to maintain the human’s since it “delimits the coordinates

\(^1\) T-cells, also known as T-lymphocytes, are a type of white blood cell necessary for immune function. In patients with immunosuppressive illnesses, these cells often become depleted leading to a high susceptibility to infection.

\(^2\) Warren uses “onticide” to specifically refer to the “double exclusion” of the Black queer whose existence underscores “non-ontology (Blackness)” and an “unfreedom (Queerness)” which “brings the subject to the limit of subjectivity” (14). He notes the doublebind of Afro-pessimist and Queer theory which are unable to contend with the interstices since “queerness’ is impossible without the derelict being of blackness —its grammar, object, and predating ‘subject’ emerge through the death sentence of blackness” (7).
of the human” (6) and further reifies the divide between who is human and who is not; who exists wholly and who hovers uncertainly like a ghost.

It’s worthy to note that this delineation of what is “not me” is a violence the body imparts on itself. The body desperately etches its borders in a frantic attempt to substantiate its existence, bringing the scalpel to itself and forcibly resecting that which it circumscribes as decidedly “not me”. The “not me” falls to the floor in a heap, already fated to become discarded waste. In doing this, the body seeks to excise that which disrupts. Whatever is deemed “not me” may at one time been “of me” — blood, excrement, and feces³ are all natural within the body until they ooze through the membranes and expose the oft concealed viscerality of the body. Kristeva explains this phenomenon through the revulsion that comes from glancing at the skin that forms on curdled milk; in its putrefaction, the milk has effectively transformed into something else: “But since the food is not an ‘other’ for ‘me,’ who am only in their desire, I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish myself” (3). Through the act of nausea, I attempt to reassert myself against a force which threatens to engulf me. The act of excision relegates the abject to a reality that undoes its existence as ever “part of me”: once it passes the threshold of “not me” it is as if it were never “of me”.

³ “Blood, excrement and feces”, although part of the body, do not bear the same weight as something that is contended as an intimate part of oneself like a limb or an organ. When one expels waste, although there is a confrontation with the abject in that the waste carries with it a truth of the leaky and impure nature of the human, there is no grief that comes with the flushing of the toilet; it is a discharge rather than an excision. An excision would more aptly refer to the amputation of a limb that has necrosed or exhibited an aberrancy that leads to its forced removal from the body, leaving behind a gaping wound and harrowing (phantom) pain. The desire to be rid of it must then outweigh (or at least justify to the subject desperate to hold on to “I”) the grief that comes from its absence.
The abject, then, is whatever has “betrayed” the body in some way — (in)conspicuously crossed over into a diseased locale that warrants its forced removal. In this way, the removal is rationalized as a kind of debridement that promotes the survival of the body — when a limb is gangrenous, amputation is often vital to prevent fatal infectious complications like sepsis. The abject’s perceived fecundity is an endangerment to the body which fears becoming enfolded in its aberrancy and ceasing to exist. Susan Sontag describes the tumor in this language, noting its “unregulated, abnormal, incoherent growth” (62) which places the body in a position of vulnerability: “The tumor has energy, not the patient; ‘it’ is out of control” (62-63). It is the unobtrusive growth (metastasis) of the tumor that is especially frightening since it suggests the proliferation and hijacking of a thing that the body cannot quite identify nor locate. Sontag explains this process further in *Illness as Metaphor*:

Cancer cells ‘colonize’ from the original tumor to far sites in the body, first setting up tiny outposts (‘micrometastases’) whose presence is assumed though they cannot be detected. Rarely are the body’s defenses vigorous enough to obliterate a tumor that has established its own blood supply and consists of billions of destructive cells. However, ‘radical’ the surgical intervention, however many ‘scans’ are taken of the body landscape, most remissions are temporary; the prospects are that ‘tumor invasion’ will continue, or that rogue cells will eventually regroup and mount a new assault on the organism”. (64-65)

The body attempts to subdue the abject through excision; cutting it off from the source and severing its (physical) connection to the body. Although Sontag notes that “most remissions are temporary”, the type of eradication I am concerned with has less to do
with the somatic removal of a thing than the metaphysical remnants that always point to the absence of a thing which used to be present. In this way, complete eradication is never possible; something phantom always seems to linger, hinting at an existence long after it has been removed.

Much of this thesis will contend with the term “aberrancy” which I would like to clarify. When Magrit Shildrick speaks of aberrancy she is referring to the wholly organic deviant figures she labels as “monsters”. Monsters or monstrous figures include all those who exhibit some form of “corporeal excess”: “they are…what Donna Haraway calls ‘inappropriate/d others’ in that they challenge and resist normativ(ity)” (15). It is not that the monster, in its aberrancy, constitutes an “unnatural” threat to the order of the organism. Rather, the monster evokes “ontological unease” because it is intrinsically part of nature and thus suggests the capability for the natural world to produce variable corporealities. Just as Haraway notes: “the biological is no guarantee of a predictable given structure of reality; on the contrary, the monsters that most effectively complicate our preconceptions are precisely those that are blatantly organic” (qtd. in Shildrick 16). The anxiety of the monster is an uncanny one since it is both reminiscent of something unmistakably human yet terrifyingly anomalous. This thesis won’t focus solely on “monsters”, nor do I consider all forms of aberrancy reminiscent of Shildrick’s notion of monstrous. This becomes particularly evident with individuals who do not possess a rare deviant physicality but are still construed as personas non-grata by the cultural body that must be shunned, ostracized and expelled. These figures encompass an aberrancy compounded by their “outsider status” that manifests into a sense of alienation and loneliness.
This thesis will construe the abject as “the ghostly subject” rather than “the invisible subject”, since the former aptly invokes the ontological murkiness that underscores its existence and the haunting that is always implied by the spectre. To be ghostified is to be temporally fractured into a life that barely exists. The term “ghostly subject” upholds the bifurcated nature of the abject as simultaneously living and dead, evoking something that is perpetually contained in the past. It is reminiscent of Alain Badiou’s inexistent existence, yet the ghostly subject also possesses an uncanniness which looms over the cultural body and bespeaks the violence of the excision. Ghostly subject also emphasizes the liminality of the abject as not fully object nor fully subject but something indeterminate and unstable. There are some distinctive shades of Antonio Gramsci’s theory of the subaltern as it relates to subjugation by a hegemonic structure — this will be particularly evident in chapters focusing on the modes of abjection that are mediated by the state like hospitals, colonies, prisons, and schools. I hope to consider abjection as both a psychoanalytic response to a “breakdown in meaning” and as a kind of mechanical structure (often born out of this breakdown) that exacts its duty decisively and calculatedly like a surgical instrument. This is meant to say abjection is not so sudden, so instinctual as in Kristeva’s case of putrid milk where the body gags before the brain can fully make sense of it. Scholars like Karen Shimakawa have pivoted from this rendering of the term in order to consider abjection as kind of “descriptive paradigm” to account for its “psychic, symbolic, legal, and aesthetic dimensions” (4). I am interested, therefore, in a cultural analysis that seeks to bring, à la John Akomfrah, seemingly disparate figures into “affective proximity [with]

4 The term “ghostly subject” is not a neologism and has also been used by the Australian poet Maria Takolander as the title for her 2015 poetry collection.
one another” (qtd. in Jafa 1). Affective proximity presupposes that “certain things seek to be next to other things” (9); there is an alchemy that comes from conjuring them in the same material space. Like the textile artist that selects a multitude of fibers to create a mosaic, I hope to draw on a range of films (shorts, documentaries, feature lengths, animated), texts (novels, memoirs, poetry) and art (performance, visual), to better envisage what I am proposing as the ghostly subject.

Where the term “ghostly” is not directly stated in this thesis (although the first chapter “The Aporia of the Ghost” will engage with the ghost directly) in reference to the subjects analyzed, it is implied (haunting in its own sense), this is because the abject, like the ghost, exists in an ontological aporia — the expulsion of the abject is, in effect, a tale of ghostification. As Avery Gordon notes that “to write stories centering exclusions and invisibilities is to write ghost stories” (115). The abject calls us “to engage with the shadows and what is living there” (115), to confirm, as Toni Morrison states in her essay “Unspeakable Things Unspoken, “that invisible things are not necessarily ‘not-there’; that a void may be empty, but [it] is not a vacuum” (11). This shift in focus works to defamiliarize invisibility and reify the modes of excision that manufacture the ghost. Consider her words in a 2003 interview with the writer Hilton Als regarding the title of Ralph Ellison’s 1952 novel Invisible Man: “… the question for me was ‘Invisible to whom?’ Not to me” (qtd. in Als). Morrison’s observation is a relevant one since it forces us to question to whom the subject is “invisible”; whether the “ghost” is ostensibly a ghost. “In addition,” Morrison writes, “certain absences are so stressed, so ornate, so planned, they call attention to themselves; arrest us with intentionality and purpose, like neighbourhoods that are defined by the populations held away from them” (11). The
absence, like a wound, illuminates a gap, and like Gina Pane explains with her artistic process which will be further analyzed in the third chapter of this thesis (“Too Grotesque to Behold”), it focalizes what is concealed. The narrator of *Invisible Man* calls attention to the “non-ontology” of blackness — what Calvin Warren describes as “metaphysical nothing” — and effectively “expose[s] the unbridgeable rift between being and function for blackness” (6). Yet “nothing” like “blackness” — and in a similar vein to the ghost and the abject — “shatters ontological ground and security” and is rendered “an object of knowledge” that can be subdued and “analyze[d]” (6). This notion of objectification will be figured further in the second chapter, “Reaching Object Status” which explores the process of (attempting) to sublimate the abject into an object in a similar effort to avoid engulfment. The last chapter of this thesis, “A New Corporeal Reality” is perhaps the explanation of the “post-rupture” and the subject’s attempt to (re)construct a sense of integrity from a post-surgical (post-traumatic) body.
CHAPTER 1: THE APORIA OF THE GHOST

THE SPECTRAL TURN

Much like Julia Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror* is credited for popularizing the term abjection and bringing it into scholarly focus, Jacques Derrida’s *Spectres de Marx* (Specters of Marx) is often considered the “apogee” of what many dub “the spectral turn” — a flourishing of writing and study (beginning in the late 80’s) dedicated to deconstructing the figure of the “spectre” or ghost (Blanco and Peeren 5; Weinstock 62). According to María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren, Derrida’s treatise on the spectre is compounded by two critical things: First, a critique of previous scholars’ (Freud, Adorno) desire to “exorcize” the ghost — since, as they argued, the ghost coalesces all theoretical renderings into an animistic framework that undermines its very legitimacy, or, at least in Adorno’s analysis of the occult, gives undue elevation to a kind of mythological reading of the world that effectively “conceal[s] the alienation produced by the subject’s reification in capitalist production” (5). Second, Marx and Engel’s assertion at the beginning of *The Communist Manifesto* that “a specter is haunting Europe – the specter of communism” (Derrida 2). Derrida’s use of the term “spectre” rather than “ghost” is more than just an archaism. In their introduction to the anthology *The Spectralities Reader*, Blanco and Peeren highlight the term’s “etymological link to visibility and vision, to that which is both looked at (as fascinating spectacle) and looking (in the sense of examining)” (2). “Spectre” possesses a “suitability for exploring and illuminating phenomena other than the putative return of the dead” (2) which makes it apt for a host of disciplines and fields of studies. Most notably, spectre became
foundational in trauma theory, and scholars such as Cathy Caruth took it up in their examination of the “haunting” nature of trauma which renders the violent event “locatable” in its cyclical repetition — often in the form of nightmares and flashbacks (4).

What is noteworthy in Derrida’s analysis of the spectre is “his suggestion that rather than the ghost being expelled, the ghost should remain, be lived with, as a conceptual metaphor signalling the ultimate disjointedness of ontology, history, inheritance, materiality, and ideology” (Blanco and Peeren 7). The reuptake of the ghost in “the spectral turn” also had a notable lode for the poststructuralist scholar since the very figure of the ghost embodies a “paradigmatic deconstructive gesture… that undermines the fixedness of…binary oppositions” (Weinstock 62). In other words, the ghost is the “no-thing” that ruptures temporality: “the spectre never dies, it remains always to come and come back” (Simmons 135) and its presence (always denoting an absence) embodies an “irrecuperable intrusion” that disrupts “our available intellectual frameworks” (Davis 373).

It is this “unfixed” nature of the ghost that will be the primary focus of this chapter. I will use “ghost” and “spectre” interchangeably, since they are often regarded as synonyms in most dictionaries — although in some readings, “spectre” seems to evoke a more sinister sort of ghost (“one of a terrifying nature or aspect” (OED)). What I aim to consider is the uncanny nature of the ghost and its literalization of a haunting which has asserted itself into the present. My aim is not to argue for the validity of the ghost’s existence but rather examine the way it ruptures meaning and indicates an aporetic ontology; as Frederic Jameson aptly states: “Spectrality does not involve the conviction that ghosts exist… all it says…is that the living present is scarcely as self-sufficient as it
claims to be; that we would do well not to count on its density and solidity, which might under exceptional circumstances betray us” (86). What the spectral turn, therefore, is most concerned with, is a praxis “towards the uncertainty, heterogeneity, multiplicity, and indeterminacy that characterize language and Being because of their inevitable entanglement with alterity and difference” (9).

THE RETURN OF THE DEAD

The ghost has always had something of an omnipresence in literature and culture — “although more insistently in certain societies and periods than others” (Blanco and Peeren 2). In the Western canon, the ghost’s popularity surged in the 19th century when the proliferation of new technological media, the literary genre of ghost stories, and the formation of psychology and other scientific disciplines all coalesced (2). The ghost had previously existed as a “powerful metaphor for encounters with disturbing forms of otherness” yet its “figurative use” was still anchored to the practice of quantifiably proving its existence (and its adjacent connection to other occult practices like clairvoyance and telepathy); this rendered the ghost “less a tool for obtaining insight into something else than itself an object of knowledge and scientific experimentation” which actually “prevented the ghost’s figurative potential from fully emancipating itself (3). Freud, for example, steers away from the ghost in his theorization of unheimlich or the uncanny “in order to avoid intermixing the uncanny with ‘what is purely gruesome’” (qtd. in Blanco and Peeren 3). Blanco and Peeren contend that “purely gruesome” in this context refers to the absurdity in believing in the ghost’s existence (3). Interestingly, the uncanny is actually predicated on the belief of the ghost’s inexistence since it arises
out of the repression of death. Brian McCuskey explains “that a superstitious person, whose mind readily accommodates occult phenomena, will not experience the frisson of the uncanny, feeling instead only fatalism and fear” (qtd. in Blanco and Peeren 4-5).

The uncanny is seen in seizures, since they hint at “automatic, mechanical processes at work behind the ordinary appearance of mental activity” (226) and E.T.A. Hoffman’s the sandman who maims the eyes of children and elicits the terror of bodily disintegration (227). Yet the largest example of the uncanny is death, for it is death, both familiar and distant, which illuminates the precarity of life.

In *Film, Horror, and the Body Fantastic*, Linda Badley notes that “the fear of ghosts was replaced…by the modern fear of deadness — of decomposition and nonbeing, of disease and pain” (43). When the ghost transformed to the projectable screen, the “deadness” of the ghost needed to be heightened in order to elicit that sense of uncanniness. Now the ghosts would have “to manifest their deadness, their ‘ancestry,’ in biological forms and special visual effects” (43). As Helene Cixous notes, “death in the modern sense, as absence, cannot be shown except in material form” which presents a problem for the screen: how does one visualize the invisible? (qtd. in Badley 42). One option is Jansson’s Ninny, who wears a dress marked by no visible limbs to emphasize the body that should be there, uncannily depicting “‘a gap where one would like to be assured of unity’” (qtd. in Badley 42). Ghosts of yore were often marked by eerie sounds, floating or moving furniture, and “extremes of temperature and touch” (42). In phantasmagoria, the ghost was a spectral image projected on screen. But the horror films required more than camera obscura projections. The ectoplasmic “goo” which came to define the 80’s and 90’s ghosts of horror became a material (and
biological) way to signify the ghost’s presence. Badley particularly notes its prevalence in the films *Poltergeist* (1982) and *Ghostbusters* (1984) where the substances function as “abject leavings…of slime, afterbirth, gas, and noise” (47).

Ghosts have also been an integral part of theatre where their presence is often a harbinger which brings doom, a catalyst that unfurls the conflict of the play, or the manifestation of a character’s burgeoning madness. Alice Rayner explains the relationship between the ghost and the stage further:

> Ghosts animate our connections to the dead, producing a visible, material, and affective relationship to the abstract terms of time and repetition, sameness and difference, absence and presence. If we doubt the presence of those absent, it may be only because the abstractions are safer more comfortable. A ghost, particularly in the theater, ought to startle an audience into a shiver. Doubt rationalizes the shiver, but it also signals an encounter. Where doubt exists, there may well be a ghost. As Harrison argues, the earth on which we live is itself the home and dominion of the dead. To understand our institutional means of reflecting that dominion, theatre gives us ghosts. (xiii)

The ghost of Hamlet’s father is perhaps the most popular theatrical example of ghostliness — and the one Derrida considers extensively in *Spectres de Marx*. When the ghost of the former King enters the play to inform Hamlet that he was murdered by the current King Claudius, Hamlet seeks “epistemological certitude” (174) attempting to verify whether the spectral figure is an illusion, a figment of his madness, or the verifiable truth. Colin Davis highlights Derrida’s preoccupation with two crucial moments in *Hamlet*: “The first is Hamlet’s reference to time as ‘out of joint’, suggesting that the
The appearance of the ghost reveals the present to be fissured, haunted both by the past and by the future, no longer fully present-to-itself” (74). The second “is Marcello’s injunction to Horatio, as scholar, to speak to the ghost” (74). Derrida wishes to not only engage the ghost, but to speak to it, and more importantly, to “make or to let a spirit speak” (qtd. in Davis 74). The ghost’s continuous intrusions fracture the temporality of the play; the past literally re-asserts itself into the present and displays, as Graber argues, “the uncanny [nature of] the play in which the Heimlich and Unheimlich are opposite and identical” (Riordan 177). The ghost reifies the topsy-turvy nature of the play where the “illusion” is not the spectre but the Danish court permeated with murder and deceit; the ghost “reveals the amiss to be here, in a home that is no longer home” (177).

The dead “haunting” as ghosts extends past the bounds of the stage. The artist and photographer Francesca Woodman’s photographs, often displaying Woodman as an obscured or concealed subject, are most commonly described as ghostly. Katharine Conley notes that the composition of the photographs “stretch photography’s limits of space and time results in images that appear to suspend time in ways that dwell surrealistically on enveloping experience” (152). The blur of exposure gives Woodman’s body an anamorphic appearance and the settings of old, run-down houses further elicits a sense of haunting. Yet the haunting is also doubly since the photographs have been imbued with a more heightened sense of “ghostliness” following the photographer’s death at 22 by suicide. Posthumously, Woodman’s photographs are described as “haunting” and foreboding, as if the aesthetic qualities of the photographs somehow reify the body-in-pain. The tragedy of Woodman’s life is inseparable from her art — a
feature she shares in common with the Iranian poet turned filmmaker Forough Farrokhzad whose film *The House is Black* will be discussed later in this thesis.

Davis aptly notes that “the ghost’s appearance is the sign of a disturbance in the symbolic, moral or epistemological order (2). It’s presence (which Badley calls an “insurrection” (52)) points to an absence that reasserts itself into the present. The aporetic nature of the ghost is evocative of the abject which also similarly indicates a “disturbance” in order that is threatening to the subject that wishes to remain intact.
CHAPTER 2: REACHING OBJECT STATUS

THE INSTABILITY OF THE ABJECT

In the first chapter of *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva defines the abject using these terms:

The abject is not an object facing me, which I name or imagine. Nor is it an object, an otherness ceaselessly fleeing in a systematic quest of desire. What is abject is not my correlative, which, providing me with someone or something else as support, would allow me to be more or less detached and autonomous. The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I. If the object, however, through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, which, as a matter of fact, makes me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it, what is abject, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses. (1-2)

The abject magnetizes one towards the pole of no-meaning. The object, on the other hand, is safe: “through its opposition” there is a comfortableness that dissuades the arbitrary nature of meaning. The object is whole, graspable and fixed; it can be overpowered and contained. If the abject can be said to possess a definitive haecceity, it is that it is undefinable, existing as neither a subject nor an object. The praxis of excision, therefore, returns to this instability of the abject, and the desire to eradicate it is mediated by this instability. Elizabeth Grosz notes the way the abject collapses the subject/object partition and, in turn, illuminates its very fragility: “Neither subject nor object, the abject makes clear the impossible and untenable identity of each. If the
object secures the subject in a more or less stable position, the abject signals the fading or disappearance, the absolute mortality and vulnerability of the subject’s relation to and dependence on the object” (qtd. in Arya 28). Rina Arya, in her response to Grosz’s assertion, notes the inability for the abject to be objectified, since objectification suggests that the abject can be made tangible and resisted (28). If the abject’s encroachment on the subject leads to a sense of disarray and loss of control, then, in her words, it can never be made into an object. As Grosz states, “The abject is an impossible object, still part of the subject: an object the subject strives to expel but which is ineliminable” (29). Arya contends that the “pulvering force of the abject” repels its ability to be kept at a “safe (spectator) distance” (29) and therefore, to be construed and handled like an object: “In the confrontation of abjection we are in a state beside ourselves, as the threat increases, the stability of our boundaries weakens” (28).

THE PROCESS OF OBJECTIFICATION

Although the abject cannot be fully objectified, since it is inherently inassimilable, I would argue that the desire to cast it off is also concomitant with the desire to render it an object. The language that surrounds the abject: expel, destroy, diminish, subdue, ward off, all suggest a desire to construe the abject in object-like terms. Even if the abject can only reach the peripheries of object-like status, extending the abject to the asymptote of “objectness” brings one closer and closer to fulfilling the desire of sublimating the abject into the object. It cannot be effectively turned into an object but related to one, in a proximal fashion. When Kristeva calls the abject “the jettisoned object” (2) she is signalling it as the object that has been excluded or “jettisoned” from
objectness, yet “jettisoned object” also suggests that the abject is the dumped and excluded object; the object no one wants.

If the abject is unstable and resists being acclimated, then it is brought to the locale of objectness through a process that renders the abject fixed or invisible, at least on some dimension: murder, quarantine in a space far off from the public eye or capturing and placing the abject within the static and immovable position of an image or screen. Rendering the abject silent, mute, comatose, creates a comforting facade of objectness where the abject can be consumed, enjoyed, and marvelled at without the looming imposition of it encroaching on one’s boundaries of self.

Much of this process of objectification arises out of a surveillance that fixes the abject in a circumscribed ontological space. As Joan Copjec argues in her essay “The Orthopsychic Subject”, the Foucauldian panopticon is contingent on the materiality of the gaze which renders one “visible, governable, trackable” (56). The gaze is not static; it discerns and enacts. When the abject is cloistered into a particular space, it is being capitulated to a gaze that renders it an object of fear and disgust. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon narrates the experience of having a white child scream in terror at the sight of him on a train and the way the shriek disintegrates a Merleau-Pontian corporeal reading of the body and illuminates the undeniable “fact of blackness” (to evoke the title of the chapter). He describes the aftershock as follows:

I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism,
intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: “Sho’ good eatin’.”

On that day, completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood? (112)

The white gaze underwrites the power of the eye to objectify what it sees. Fanon’s body is “given back to [him] sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning” (113). The gaze imprisons as it fractures, taking Fanon “far off from [his] own presence” (112) until he is no more than a fungible object. The objectification of the gaze erases specificity: the very fact of Fanon being apprehended is rendered inconsequential in lieu of the “fact of blackness”; the white gaze zeroes in on this fact and after locating, interrogates and obliterates. When Foucault speaks of the panopticon, he regards it as a device that is powerful because it is internalized and incorporated as a constituent element of oneself. It is not simply the chilling fact that a gaze far off and remote surveilles I. It is that I come to surveille I. I regulate I. It is this gestalt of self-regulation that mediates the objectification of the self.

THE NUN’S STORY: THE IMAGE OF THE PANOPTICON

The panopticon was originally a 19th century architectural design by Jeremy Bentham. The design went as follows: a central tower, equipped with a watchman, was surrounded by cells. The tower, due to its central position, maintained line of sight of all the cells. It didn’t matter whether the tower was occupied or not, its centrality would
always give off “a sort of omnipresence” (Bentham) which maintained its power and authority. Foucault extrapolates the design in *Discipline and Punish* to describe the 17th century method of quarantine for plagues, which would restructure the village into a panopticon:

This enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which
the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded, in which an uninterrupted work of writing links the centre and periphery, in which power is exercised without division, according to a continuous hierarchical figure, in which each individual is constantly located, examined and distributed among the living beings, the sick and the dead — all this constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism. (197)

The panoptic model places the entire village under lockdown, enclosing the citizens in their homes and preventing them from leaving; if provisions were needed, villagers were forced to rely on what they had. When the hour struck, all doors became locked and all windows sealed shut. Everyone is confined to “a segmented, immobile, frozen space,” writes Foucault, “…and, if he (one) moves, he does so at the risk of his life, contagion or punishment” (195).

The plague necessitated a “disciplinary” form of biocontrol which “called for multiple separations, individualizing distributions, an organization in depth of surveillance and control, an intensification and a ramification of power” (198). When the plague was no longer deemed a threat, the panoptic model that burgeoned from its outbreak still remained. “The plague-stricken town”, writes Foucault, envisaged a sort of
“utopia of the perfectly governed city” where an entire space could be “immobilized by the functioning of an extensive power that bears in a distinct way over all individual bodies” (198). The plague embodied a structural segmentation that had the power to control every facet of a person’s life “through the mediation of the complete hierarchy that assured the capillary functioning of power; not masks that were put on and taken off, but the assignment to each individual of his ‘true’ name, his ‘true’ place, his ‘true’ body, his ‘true’ disease” (198). The leprosaria, on the other hand, were marked by exclusion — although Foucault notes that these projects aren’t entirely “incompatible” (199) and that the formation of leprosaria was a kind of precursor for the panoptic model of the plague. Leprosy was the exiled illness and leprosaria were constructed to confine these individuals away from the public eye. In one of his “Lectures at the Collège de France” Foucault elaborates on this exclusion and describes the harrowing way those diagnosed were cast out “beyond the limits of the community” (43) — often accompanied by a funeral procession (since leprosy was construed as a death sentence in both the literal and figurative sense). Just as the plague was extinguished as a threat, leprosy began to dim in Europe in the late seventeenth century. Around this time, there was a “great hunt for beggars, vagabonds, the idle, libertines” and the model of exclusion fostered the “sanctions” that drove “floating populations” away from the village and into “hopitaux generaux” (44) and prison cells. The models of panoptic discipline/exclusion calcified into the modern day panoptic institutions:

We see them coming slowly together, and it is the peculiarity of the nineteenth century that it applied to the space of exclusion of which the leper was the symbolic inhabitant (beggars, vagabonds, madmen and the disorderly formed the
real population) the technique of power proper to disciplinary partitioning. Treat 'lepers' as 'plague victims', project the subtle segmentations of discipline onto the confused space of internment, combine it with the methods of analytical distribution proper to power, individualize the excluded, but use procedures of individualization to mark exclusion - this is what was operated regularly by disciplinary power from the beginning of the nineteenth century in the psychiatric asylum, the penitentiary, the reformatory, the approved school and, to some extent, the hospital. (199)

Fred Zinnemann’s *The Nun’s Story* aptly highlights the segmentation and exclusion of the burgeoning panoptic models. The film is based on the 1956 novel by Kathryn Hulme who was largely inspired by her friend (and presumed partner) Marie Louise Habets’ experience as a Belgian nurse and former nun. The film stars Audrey Hepburn as a young nun named Sister Luke (formerly named Gabrielle Van Der Mal) who is stationed at an asylum in an effort to teach her humility. On her first day, Sister Luke tours the hospital, walking past a line of rooms architecturally indistinguishable from cells that are reserved for the most difficult patients. These rooms are mostly bare, with a single bed covered in straw and a bolt lock which only the attending nun can open. A patient nicknamed “Archangel” places her face to the small barbed window of the door and greets Sister Luke. In a later scene, when Sister Luke must watch the patients, Archangel asks Sister Luke to bring her a glass of water. When Sister Luke opens the door (which proves to be a lengthy affair) Archangel overtakes her and attempts to escape the cell. Archangel’s desire to exit the cell is depicted as evidence of her
“difficultness” yet the cell looms as a frightening, confined space, which, by its very architectural design, elicits a sense of terror and discomfort.

The baths are another panoptic model evident in *The Nun’s Story*. The baths, a kind of “Medieval hang up”, were designed as a form of “therapy” — since water was believed to be an inherent purifier (evidenced through ablution practices) and “universal physiological regulator” (Foucault 167). The bath was often presented as a way to “wash away” all remnants of psychological illness(es) — if not in one dunk, at least over a period of time. They were, however, often nothing more than a form of anesthetization which forcibly “submerged” the individual into an incapacitated state. Foucault reports the treatment’s objective in the Middle Ages through the example of a man who was “plung[ed]…several times into the water “until he had lost his strength and forgotten his fury”” (167). If little else, the immersive treatments worked to turn patients into mute objects, stripped of their subjectivity.

Sister Luke is brought to a room by the attending nun who prefaces it as a space “where [they] give the treatment for the violent patients” (58:30-58:38). The door opens and Sister Luke gazes upon the “baths”, a nightmarish contraption of porcelain tubs covered by (and shackled to) planks of wood with small holes for the patients’ heads to rest outside. The rest of the patient’s body is contained inside the bath. The attending nun tells Sister Luke that the patients stay in these baths between four and eight hours a day while the temperature is “maintained”.

The moment the door of the baths room is opened, there are horrifying wails and screams of protestation. The noise of the bath is heightened by the unsettling quiet of the prior scene where Sister Luke and another nun walk the long hall of cells, the only
noise coming from their footsteps and a dangling ring of keys. The nun who attends the baths strokes one patient’s head in an affectionate manner while the patient’s eyes appear deadened and others around cry loudly. Most of the sounds are inarticulate and cacophonous; what can be deciphered amounts to shrieks of agony and cries to be released. One voice in particular cries: “stop looking at me”, encapsulating the spectacle of the clinical gaze and the desire to resist the gaze’s objectifying power. The bath scene visualizes the “treatment” as a form of torture: the patients are shackled to steaming tubs unable to move and their wails signify the success of the treatment, which, far from being therapeutic, works to weaken and subdue the patient into a state that makes them easily controllable. The abject patient, volatile and threatening to the functioning body, is objectified through the bath and in turn, rendered immovable (fixed), disciplined, and pacified.

FOROUGH FARROKHZAD & THE NEW WAVE

Forough Farrokhzad’s debut (and sole) film Kāna sīāh ast (titled in English The House is Black) came about under auspicious circumstances. Farrokhzad, then a renowned poet, began to work as an assistant to filmmaker Ebrahim Golestan. Following her assistantship on two of his documentaries (Water and Heat and A Fire), Golestan received a commission from the Shah of Iran “to make a film for the benefit of the Society for Assistance to Lepers” and gave the reins to direct to Farrokhzad (Roxane Varzi). The pair travelled to the Bababaghi Leprosarium in the city of Tabriz and filmed the documentary over a period of twelve days, five of which were spent developing a rapport with the patients. The result: a twenty-two-minute documentary, shot in black and white and showcasing the life of the Bababaghi residents, was
released in 1962 and “garnered little international attention” — aside from “the Oberhausen Film Festival, where it won the Grand Prize in 1963 and the Pesaro Film Festival, where it was screened in 1966” (Bergen-Aurand 405). *The House is Black* remains relatively obscure, despite its canonization as an integral precursor for the Iranian New Wave. Influenced by Italian neorealist sensibilities, the New Wave films were characterized by a poetic exploration of rural and working-class life and often shot in a naturalistic style. Darius Mehrjui’s *The Cow* (1969) — a film displaying a man succumbing to boanthropy after his beloved cow is stolen and murdered — is often the most notable of the New Wave. In essence, the New Wave worked to harmonize literature and cinema, incorporating poetry, novels, and plays into their works and fostering a unique kind of intertextuality. As Khatereh Sheibani notes, “The fusion of literature into cinema, which had existed in Iranian cinema since its very first days, became the hallmark of the Iranian New Wave films” (521). Farrokhzad’s poetry, in particular, served as a source of inspiration for a number of filmmakers — the title of Abbas Kiarostami’s 1999 film *The Wind Will Carry Us* is a direct reference to Farrokhzad’s poem of the same (Sheibani 535).

The structure of *The House is Black* can be best described as esoteric — in many ways, the film is a celluloid version of a Forough Farrokhzad poem with its lyrical expression and vivid metaphors. This makes the film less about the etiology of leprosy (the typical the aim of most illness focused documentaries) and more about its metaphoric potential. Farrokhzad relates the illness to a sense of “stagnation, inertia and a spiritual void that she felt were eating away at the core of Iranian society” (Roxane Varzi). “Illness as metaphor” is far from an uncommon cinematic trope. Varzi
notes it as the “zeitgeist of the day” where illness often stood as “a metaphor for society” and, in turn, “a metaphor for ugliness, alienation, and confinement” (Varzi). The use of isolated leprous subjects as metaphoric stand-ins for “political (religious, social) corruption” has been praised by many of the film’s critics, as well as the *cinema verité* style of filmmaking. Reviewer Eric Henderson notes this camera work in *Slant Magazine*, stating: “Farrokhzad trains her lens insistently on the decay of human faces in bleak honesty”; Robert Enright calls the film “arresting, truthful” (22); Jonathan Rosenbaum refers to *The House is Black* as “profoundly humanist” in his 1997 review for the Chicago Reader and that it is “without a trace of sentimentality or voyeurism”. In his reflective for Asia’s 100 Films in 2015, Rosenbaum expands on this notion further, contrasting the film to Tod Browning’s *Freaks* “which oscillates between empathy and pity” (Rosenbaum). Forough Farrokhzad on the other hand, he writes, possesses “an uncanny capacity to regard lepers without morbidity as both beautiful and ordinary, objects of love as well as intense identification” (Rosenbaum).

Through its abstract pairing of poetry and images, Farrokhzad’s *The House is Black* subverts some ethnographic, cinematic, and documentary conventions — Roxane Varzi notes Farrokhzad’s desire for an “illusive quality of images, that when coupled with poetry formed new meanings”. This style of filmmaking greatly contrasted with the ethnographic style of others at the time, notably the anthropologist Margaret Mead, who argued that the infusion of “artistic invention into documentary…ruined the

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5 Farrokhzad’s poems often dealt with these topics, typically in reference to the female plight. Her poem “Reborn” mirrors much of the lines in *The House is Black* regarding decay and a sense of desolation (Varzi).

6 Varzi notes that other Iranian writers besides Farrokhzad employed this method of extended metaphors as a way to express “political corruption”. Jalal Ale Ahmad’s famous work *Westoxification* likened contemporary Iranian society to wheat rotting” and was “a major influence in the anti-Shah sentiment at the time” (Varzi).
ethnographic project” (Varzi). Farrokhzad’s film, therefore, seems much more reminiscent of Alain Resnais’s 1956 short film *Brouillard et Nuit (Night and Fog)*, which similarly creates a kind of abstraction through its aesthetic juxtaposition of archival (black and white) and present-day (colour) footage of Auschwitz and Birkenau. Resnais, like Farrokhzad, moves through the film with a sense of deliberate elusiveness, which he explained in an interview with Charles Krantz was purposeful since “to have dealt with the fate of the Jews would have been inappropriate in that it might have diverted attention away from the universal message of vigilance” (Krantz 6). What is of note in Krantz’s interview is Resnais’s acknowledgement that in the act of universalizing “there is the possibility of an error of judgement” (6). This error of judgement has been noted (and argued) heavily by various filmmakers; Claude Lanzmann criticized *Night and Fog* for its display of images of horror which he believed should be destroyed rather than looked at:

> I used to say that if there had been — by sheer obscenity or miracle — a film actually shot in the past of three thousand people dying together in a gas chamber, first of all, I think that no one human being would have been able to look at this. Anyhow, I would have never included this in the film. I would have preferred to destroy it. It is not visible. You cannot look at this. (qtd. in Wilson 89)

It is the mere act of looking, at peering at the corpses of victims of war and violence, that Lanzmann critiques. As Slavoj Žižek argues, the act of depicting images of violence can actually obscure rather than sharpen the Real: “Therein lies the fundamental lesson of psychoanalysis: the images of utter catastrophe, far from giving access to the Real, can function as a protective screen AGAINST the Real” (35). Although, it’s worthy to
note that Resnais’s aim in *Night and Fog*, rather than to remove the veil of obscurity, was to reaffirm its existence; the act of looking illuminates the temporal (and spatial) distance of the viewer and effectively collapses any sense of truth or authenticity: “…In showing material objects and bodily evidence, he asks viewers to think contrarily about the malleability of proof and the impossibility of grasping the past, and in particular about the incomprehensibility of mass trauma” (Wilson 90). Still, the tension between Resnais’s use of these images and Lanzmann’s assertion that the dissemination of these images acts as a kind of reproduction of the violent trauma cannot be ignored; for it forces us to re-examine the purpose behind the use of images, particularly images that have been oft concealed from the public eye.

This prompts me to the crux of my argument: to re-consider the numerous reviews of *The House is Black* that praise Farrokhzad’s “unwavering gaze” (Piper-Burket) which does not flinch from the sights of “decay” (Henderson) and “ugliness”. What are the implications of an authorial gaze that invites viewers to look directly (obtrusively) at what has ordinarily been concealed from sight? There is always an asymmetry between the apparatus and the subject, for in capturing someone for the gaze of a viewer, the subject is rendered fixed and suspended by a lens (eye) which does not waver, look away, nor even blink. It is this very act of looking, therefore, that I wish to interrogate.

**THE HOUSE IS BLACK: THE ACT OF LOOKING**

The opening of *The House is Black* is perhaps the most revelatory and least analyzed scene in the film. The first shot is a black screen, followed by the voice of
Ebrahim Golestan. Golestan speaks directly to the viewer, stating that “there is no shortage of ugliness in the world” but “if man closed his eyes to it, there would be even more” (Farrokhzhad, 00:01-00:03; 00:04-00:08). This prefaces his description that “on the screen will appear an image of ugliness…a vision of pain no caring human being should ignore” (00:14 -0:22). It is this prelude that prefigures what is about to witnessed. The viewer is told not to “ignore” what is on the screen (which here also seems to state: “don’t look away”), conflating evasion with a kind of apathy. The black screen, a visual pause, prepares the viewer for the sight of the abject who emblematizes the suffering the viewer must contend with. The preface is a pronouncement prescribing the viewer to look; to “not look” is to disregard this “vision of pain”. There is also an appeal to the morality of the viewer, presuming that if one is “caring” they will look.

In Regarding the Pain of Others, Susan Sontag describes images of suffering as always in dialogue with the viewer (and their ability to look): “In each instance, the gruesome invites us to be either spectators or cowards, unable to look. Those with the stomach to look are playing a role authorized by many glamorous depictions of suffering” (42). All other dimensions of the image are suspended; it is the act of looking (and whether one can look or not) that engulfs everything else. As a result, looking is infused with a kind of politicality, where those who glance openly — and might I add: share, reproduce, disseminate — images of war, violence, pain, or suffering embody a superior benevolence. In this way, looking becomes altruistic. The emphasis upon “an image” also works to prioritize the physicality of the subject over the interiority and suggests a question best articulated by Adineh Golab’s character in Rakhshban Banietemad’s Under the Skin of the City when she replied to a film crew recording her
for a documentary about the Tehran election: "I wish someone would come and film what's going on right here! Right here" (1:29:57-1:30:00). She points emphatically to her heart, then pauses before engaging the filmmaker directly: "Who the hell do you show these films to, anyway?!" (1:30:02-1:30:04). The film cuts to black; a silence that belies its own response.

Following the authorial preface, Golestan articulates the motive of The House is Black as “to wipe out this ugliness and to relieve the victims” (00:24-00:28). The word “this” is purposefully metaphorically loaded, referring to both the subjects who have been circumscribed as the “objects of ugliness” as well as the broader “ugly” things which Farrokhzad wishes to eradicate. The word leprosy is only uttered outright in one scene — much like Resnais’s Night and Fog seldom uses the word “Jewish” or “Jew” which some critics attributed to his broad “universalizing” brush\(^7\). Bababaghi Leprosarium (also commonly known as Bababaghi Hospice), the setting where the film takes place, is actually one of a few “major” leprosariums in Iran. Sara Saljoughi states that “the Bababaghi leprosarium was established as a self-contained village, which suggests an attempt to draw attention away from the expulsion of lepers from Iranian towns and cities...by creating a colony that mimicked a town structure” (5). In an article on the “History of Medicine in Iran”, physicians noted “the living conditions” of Bababaghi in the 1960s as “very unfavorable” (Azizi and Bahadori 427). The aim to alleviate the “victims” is doubly, since Farrokhzad’s film was funded in part by the organization (Society for Assistance to Lepers) closely tied to Bababaghi and was created to give the illness and colony broader awareness; however, the film also

\(^7\) Claude Lanzmann claimed that the film never mentioned the word, although there are “scant images...of deportees bearing the yellow star on their clothes” (Wilson 90).
functions as a “veiled social critique” meant to alleviate those suffering under the Shah’s corrupt regime. Interestingly, the film’s elusive tone “was so subtle that even the Shah, whose regime was her target, missed her meaning and shed very public tears at the screening opening night” (Varzi).

THE HOUSE IS BLACK: SCENES OF DISQUIET

The first image of The House is Black is of a woman standing in front of a mirror. There is no sound and the camera is angled so that we are behind the woman, watching her watch her reflection. The woman’s face immediately follows the warning of “ugliness” and the nature of the gaze is vague: is she looking at her own reflection or at the viewer concealed behind the lens of the camera? Varzi argues that the woman looks at herself, particularly at her missing nasal bridge (clinically termed saddle nose) and right eye, partially obscured by excess skin — although Varzi’s own preoccupation with the woman’s face (she refers to it crudely as “an apple eaten by worms”) may have influenced her reading of the scene. The woman is captured in an intimate act and through that intimacy, exposed for the viewer’s gaze. Since there is no dialogue, the physiognomy of the woman totalizes the scene. The camera emphasizes this totality through its slow, deliberate zoom which enlarges her face to expose its features. If Richard Rushton’s Deleuzean explanation of the face as “an object or instrument that indicates something” (222) can be extrapolated here, then the woman’s face assumes a synecdochal role that indicates a visual alterity the viewer takes in, dissects (in conjunction with the apparatus of the camera, which probes and prods like a surgical tool), then assemblages back together. Allen Feldman describes “documentary
television” as form of “cellular intervention that captures and confines disordered and disordering categories of bodies” (407). Although, *The House is Black* is not made for TV and Feldman speaks particularly of the American viewing audience, his words aptly illustrate the active/passive relationship that underscores the fixedness of the subject on screen and the “malleability” of the viewer:

Staged, mounted, framed, and flattened by a distilling electronic sieve, these icons of the static become moral inversions of the progressively malleable bodies of the ideal American viewer… This visual polarity between the reformable bodies of the observer and the determined, deformed, and reduced bodies of the observed disseminates for the viewing public a cultural scenario first identified by Hegel's perceptual (and thus social) distance from the body of the Other. In turn, this body is essentialized by material constraints that deny it recognizable sentience and historical possibility. (407)

The relationship between what is in/ outside the screen mediates the diminishment/renewal of each respectively. The woman, essentialized to the decay of leprosy, is disembodied by the viewer who reaffirms their embodiment through a “perceptual entanglement” (408). Voyeurism, therefore, is not the right word to describe the relationship between the camera and viewer, since it fails to emphasize the complicit and active nature of the camera which bares its subjects with the viewer firmly holding the other end of the apparatus; when the camera zooms, the viewer leans in to observe.

The voice of a schoolboy dissolves over the face of the woman and brings the viewer into the next scene. A group of boys recite from their books, each thanking God
for a specific blessing: “the flowing water and the fruiting trees” (1:16 -1:20), “hands to work with” (1:21 -1:26), eyes and ears to detect the beauty of the world. There is an irony that is meant to be illuminated by these messages of gratitude since many of the boys have disfigured or partially missing limbs and leprosy often effects visual and auditory senses. This irony becomes complicated by the film’s noted staging of dialogue. Sara Saljoughi describes the criticism of this staging further:

Despite general acclaim from scholars and critics, one of the common criticisms launched against Farrokhzad’s film is that she staged pivotal scenes, such as the ones with extensive dialogue that take place in a classroom at the beginning and end of the film. Because the notion of staging has long threatened the ideals of documentary’s relationship to profilmic reality, it is an easy target for the discomfort provoked by Farrokhzad’s treatment of leprosy. This response is evidence of the resistance to the film’s pressure on generic expectations; it suggests that it is audacious to experiment with the subject of leprosy. Thus, the pressure the film puts on genre also amplifies an a priori unease with its subject matter. But Farrokhzad’s staging gains importance in the debate over the film’s genre only because it seems easily identifiable as a “problem,” one that is perhaps clearer to spot than the film’s other instances of creative construction. (3-4)

The notable “other instances of creative construction” are Farrokhzad’s poetic commentary and Golestan’s Godard-esque clinical narration. The poetry, staging, and narration can all be seen as evocative of Farrokhzad’s inventiveness and complication of realism. Experimentation on its own does not diminish a film’s authenticity, since
even the most “objective” filmmaking is often nothing more than well concealed subjectivity⁸. The classroom scenes, therefore, must be read in proximity with the poetry and narration, since they all reveal Farrokhzad’s harrowing omnipresence in the film. Saljoughi describes it aptly when she “consider[s] the poetic as an instance of intervention or politics in form: Farrokhzad must stage what does not yet exist” (4). Farrokhzad disrupts form through staging and inserts her politicality through poesis; in the process, the subjects are rendered objects (or instruments) that illuminate Farrokhzad’s subjectivity.

**THE HOUSE IS BLACK: ASSUMING “I”**

Farrokhzad’s first instance of poetry follows the classroom scene. As the camera pans over the boys seated in rows, all looking at a spot past the camera’s view, she says, “Who is this in hell praising you, O Lord?” The scene moves to show various shots of people, all meant to emphasize alterity; one man sings to himself and the camera begins at his stomping bare feet before slowly panning upwards to reveal one hand snapping (the other at his side, presumably immobile) until it rests on his face, which appears serious and wholly immersed. There is a delay before Farrokhzad’s poetry enters again, her words in many ways a continuation of the song:

I will sing your name, O Lord.

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⁸ This view is common in most analyses of “realist” texts, which, through their aesthetic conventions, conceal the work of art. Farrokhzad chooses to reveal art and in turn, herself as the subjective maker and voice of the documentary. Edward Said also highlights the impossibility of divorcing a work from its author in his Introduction to Orientalism where he states, “that no production of knowledge in the human sciences can ever ignore or disclaim its author’s involvement as a human subject in his own circumstances” (11).
I will sing your name with the ten-string lute.

For I have been made in a strange and frightening shape.

My bones were not hidden from you when I was being created,

I was molded in the bowels of the earth. (4:02-4:25)

Farrokhzad’s narration is quite reminiscent of Mary Shelley’s monster who quite eloquently rebukes Frankenstein for his aberrant form which makes others turn away from him in horror:

Hateful day when I received life…Accursed creator! Why did you form a monster so hideous that even you turned from me in disgust? God, in pity, made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image; but my form is a filthy type of yours, more horrid even from the very resemblance. Satan had his companions, fellow devils, to admire and encourage him, but I am solitary and abhorred. (105)

The cause of the monster’s outburst, Victor Frankenstein, “accursed creator”, records “the minutest descriptions” of the monster’s “odious and loathsome person” in “language which painted [his] horrors and rendered mine (the monster’s) indelible” (105). There is an ironic similarity between Frankenstein’s solipsistic entries, which render the monster invisible, and Farrokhzad’s hostage of the subjective “I”, which works to focalize her metaphorization of their pain. Farrokhzad’s own poetry may have been similar thematically to The House is Black, however, the consistent use of “I” in a film where the subjects are largely silent signifies a sort of displacement. If the voice of Farrokhzad is meant to be interpreted as a proxy for the film’s subjects, then the “I” infuses Farrokhzad with an interiority that the subjects (rendered mostly as images) are denied;
in other words, the subjects become mute so Farrokhzad can speak — even if she is speaking for them.

Golestan narrates a scene at the clinic which seems, at least tonally, a deviation from Farrokhzad’s subjective poetic musings. He assumes the role of doctor and in a sterile voice, states the symptoms and complications of leprosy before concluding that the illness is curable (twice) if proper measures are taken (“wherever lepers have been adequately cared for, the disease has vanished” (6:22-6:28)). The moving images display a multitude of treatments: a doctor forcibly opening a man’s mouth to examine his teeth; the same doctor scraping excess skin off another’s foot; a woman having weights pressed on her hands to reduce swelling; multiple people getting eye drops, injections, and undergoing physical examinations. All of these scenes are foreign to a viewer estranged from the illness, although they are presented as part of the quotidian routine of life for the subjects.

There are some images in the film which display the subjects more in the position and activity of persons invested in personhood. These scenes depict more of the ordinary parts of life and portray Bababaghi as a microcosmic representation of the larger world: a man eating in the waiting area of the clinic, two boys wrestling, women weaving looms, children playing checkers with stones, a young girl brushing another’s hair — this scene is particularly resonant, showing the girls laughing at something in the distance; there is even a joyous wedding celebration with people playing instruments and dancing. These scenes become complicated with Farrokhzad’s poetry which always works to reveal the uncanny nature of the images (or at least evoke a sense of disquiet). The final part of the film is in many ways a marriage of poetry and
image as the film returns once again to the classroom. A boy reads a passage about Venus, noting its beauty and proximity to Earth. The teacher asks another boy to write a phrase on the board with the word “house” in it and after a clip that shows the people of the colony standing in front the open entrance gate before closing it shut, he writes in Arabic: “the house is black” (20:16-20:18). The ominous ending is emblematic of Farrokhzad’s metaphorization of the house as the total of Iran (humanity, Earth itself) which has been charred and rendered black:

In the two moments that are most poignant, when the poem becomes a material image of itself as script on the blackboard (and thus not voiced) we learn that…indeed, the house, surely just a metaphor, is black. Leprosy is pointed to, documented, named as such, as “the real,” but the house is not the leper colony, for those doors…close before the movie ends and another house, society, is named black. (Varzi)

The end of the film brings the various metaphors floating through the celluloid expanse — ugliness, putridity, death, decay, despair, isolation — to a climax. What was subtlety suggested has now been literally inscribed with chalk. There are a few parting words from Farrokhzad before the film cuts to black: “O overrunning river driven by the force of love, flow to us, flow to us” (20:21-20:29). In these parting words, there appears, if only for a moment, a deviation from “I” and the evocation (acknowledgment) of a collective.

PRINCESS MONONOKE: THE CIRCUMSCRIBED SPACE OF IRONTOWN

Although Hayao Miyazaki’s 1997 animated film Mononoke-hime (Princess Mononoke) differs considerably from Forough Farrokhzad’s The House is Black in form,
tone, and style, there is a depiction of characters with leprosy that merits a comparison. The film, set in Japan during the late Muromachi period, follows a young Emishi prince named Ashitaka who journeys from his village to search for a cure for his right arm which has been wounded and cursed by a boar god. Ashitaka arrives in Irontown, led by a woman named Lady Eboshi who takes in outcasts and provides them work and refuge from destitution. The girls rescued from the brothel work the bellows and the leprous characters build weapons in an alcove of Eboshi’s secret garden. The guns are part of her larger plan to take rule of the forest — ironically, an iron ball from one of her guns corrupts the boar god that attacks Ashitaka at the start of the film. Ashitaka admonishes Eboshi for abusing the forest and displacing its creatures: “You stole the boar’s woods and made a monster of him” (39:52-39:54). As Ashitaka’s cursed arm begins to swell, poised for attack, a character with leprosy named Osa begins to speak. The other leprous characters are engaged in work, but Osa lies down, his face entirely covered by bandages, signifying the progression of the illness. He speaks to Ashitaka in defense of Eboshi: “Young man, I too am cursed. I understand your rage and grief…but I beg you not to kill our lady. She is the only person who ever treated us as human. She did not fear our disease. She washed and bandaged our flesh” (40:49 - 41:15). In the original Japanese version, the illness of the characters is never directly stated. The term gyobyo is used which roughly translates to “incurable illness”. In the English translation, Osa uses the word “leper” to refer his illness. Miyazaki confirmed in 2016 that the illness was leprosy and that the conception of the characters stemmed from a trip he took to a sanitarium near his home — “a place where deep suffering has accumulated”. Miyazaki
states that he “wanted to portray people who were living with what was said to be an incurable disease caused by bad karma” (qtd. in Kitano).

Lady Eboshi’s taking in of Osa and the other leprous characters complicates the reading of her character as purely antagonistic — this is particularly highlighted with her desire to use the blood of the Deer god (which resides in the forest and possesses healing powers) to cure their leprosy. Eunjung Kim and Michelle Jarman highlight this tension and the way disability functions as an integral facet of Irontown:

The fact that Eboshi’s society establishes itself through discovering, collecting, and rescuing prostitutes and lepers from moral condemnation in feudal society suggests that constructions of disability are foundational to solidifying and promoting her modernizing project. Eboshi embraces an enlightenment reasoning by disregarding ancient laws and curses toward prostitutes and lepers. (56)

Lady Eboshi treats and provides employment for those abject from the town. One of the women mentions that Eboshi buys their contracts in order to relieve them from the brothels: “when she finds girls sold as slaves, Eboshi buys their freedom” (34:32-34:36). The life of working the bellows is arduous, yet the women express its superiority over “the towns”; in Irontown, women “eat their fill and the men know their place” (44:08-44:11). The rapport between Eboshi and the citizens also suggests a sense of camaraderie — Eboshi tells one of the men with leprosy that she means to bring them some “sake” and the women are shown in many instances engaging Eboshi in jovial conversation. Yet, there is still an evident “power dynamic” that permeates the relationship between Eboshi and the “marked” citizens (56). Lady Eboshi is meant to be
allusive of a Western Imperialist figure — although, rather than exorcize disability she incorporates it into her framework. She employs the citizens to work on a “modernizing project” that is centralized on colonizing the forest. Kim and Jarman also posit that the very existence of Irontown reinforces the abjection of the marked characters through its constant rearticulation of the violence outside its circumscribed borders:

This new female and disability-centered "Utopian" community relies upon, and thus reinforces, the mistreatment of these people in the outside world. Eboshi’s cloistered community is constructed around protecting its citizens from the hostilities of the outside world, but for this to be successful, these external threats must be continually remembered and reactivated. In effect, although Eboshi claims benevolence, her segregated community enacts the rationale of modern institutionalization, which promises protection to vulnerable populations, but actually serves a greater mission of protecting "normal" society from contact with its marked others. (56)

Eboshi embodies the role of saviour and commander. The marked citizens join Irontown to seek refuge, yet the looming violent spectre of “the towns” inscribes them within the ontological space marked out by Eboshi and capitulates them to her commands.

There is a level of abstraction afforded by animation that evades the objectifying nature of the camera’s gaze. Miyazaki, however, also infuses his subjects with the ability to directly express their own thoughts and emotions. Osa states that “life is suffering and pain” and despite “the world and its people [being] cursed… we still wish to live” (41:19- 41:28). Osa’s evocation of the accursed nature of the world connects him to Ashitaka and assuages his pain. In many ways, Ashitaka can be read as another
“marked character” since he seeks refuge in Irontown after being scarred by the boar and interestingly, his scar is still present at the film’s close, although considerably smaller in size. *Princess Mononoke* depicts the characters evocations of their interiority and gives them space to express sorrow, pain, joy and hope. Miyazaki depicts a subjectivity that is largely displaced in Forough Farrokhzad’s *The House is Black*. In *The House is Black*, the viewer gets brief glimpses into the world of those abjected through quarantine; in *Princess Mononoke*, we hear them speak.
CHAPTER 3: TOO GROTESQUE TO BEHOLD

A CONFRONTATION WITH THE SELF

Mona Hatoum’s Corps Étranger is a video art installation that originally ran in 1994. She invited viewers to enter a cylindrical dome composed of wood and watch a continuous video feed of her body undergoing an endoscopy. The combination of the claustrophobic space (approximately 350 x 300 x 350 cm) and the churning, rhythmic sounds of the body, as the endoscope probed deeper and deeper into Hatoum’s internal organs, elicited a sense of disorientation in the viewer. As Rina Arya notes, while being presented with an image of supposed familiarity (one’s own body) there is a sense of confronting the abject, where the viewer becomes separated from the image on screen and feels momentarily displaced as a subject (117). The coloured orifices and vessels of the body on screen expose an intimate part of oneself that is ordinarily concealed. There has always been a profound anxiety surrounding the internal parts of the body existing (or its contents being expelled) outside — when discussing the corpse, Kristeva notes its terrifying encroachment on the border of inside/outside and the way it renders what was once clear and intact, muddy and strange: “The body’s inside, in that case, shows up in order to compensate for the collapse of the border between inside and outside. It is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer guarantee[s] the integrity of one’s “own and clean self” but, scraped or transparent, invisible or taut, gave way before the dejection of its contents” (Kristeva 53). Certainly, the success of Hatoum’s work lies in its disruption of the body’s strict boundaries. One reviewer noted the disquieting nature of the exhibition when it was presented at Art Basel: “The images are
fantastic and at the same time repulsive; because this “meat inspection” takes place on the floor, one looks down at an anonymous mass (the body) almost as if it were litter or refuse. But then, with lowered eyes, one finds oneself in a kind of devotional position, and the cylinder simultaneously suggests a temple-like structure and a research laboratory” (Russ). The paradoxical status of the body as foreign and familiar creates a frightening confrontation and forces one to engage in a self-abjection that violently thrusts away any sense of integrity. Stepping into the cylinder brings one into a sight (knowledge) which was not meant to be seen (possessed). In other words: stepping in is stepping too far.

*Corps Étranger* aptly encapsulates the title of this chapter, “Too Grotesque to Behold”. When I state that something is too grotesque to behold, I mean that the grotesque forces us to confront something which is too much; it overwhelms us and cannot be comfortably integrated into the psyche. Much like Kristeva’s definition of the abject as what must be “permanently thrust aside in order to live” (3), there is a constant desire to look away, cower and disregard the grotesque, in order to remain intact. Yet, there is also a strange sort of allurement which draws one in (often) against their own will; it is a sense of embodiment that terrifies as it arouses. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva couples abjection with a grim, almost delightful-like sensation (18). There is this titillation that accompanies witnessing the abject even though it is tinged with both awe and fear, reminiscent of Lacan’s notion of *jouissance*. As Linda Badley notes in her analysis of the 1981 film *An American Werewolf in London*, it is an “agony so extravagant as to have its own perverse beauty” (7).
Arya notes that the term “grotesque” originated from the Italian word “grotta” which “described images and entities that exhibited the following characteristics: the combination of incongruous parts, the decomposition of reality, the metamorphosis of one reality into another and the disproportionality of form” (89). The grotesque is often seen in horror films in the form of streaming blood, rotting flesh, decapitated heads, missing limbs, dismembered body parts and organs, a hybrid creature that is uncannily human, a human that shapeshifts into a giant animal. The grotesque is seen in Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* when Gregor Samsa awakes one morning from “unsettling dreams” to find that he has transformed “into a monstrous vermin” (3). As an insect, Gregor is alienated from his family who are repulsed by his appearance and spends most of his time in isolation before eventually succumbing to his death. Matthew Powell contends that Kafka explores the “tension between humans and non-humans, between what is ‘the self’ and what is ‘not the self’” ultimately revealing “those aspects of reality whose very existence must remain in shadow in order to maintain a coherent and sustainable reality” (130). The grotesque is most evident in the all of the “transformation” films popularized in late 20th century horror genre: Ridley Scott’s *Alien* (1979) with its frightening scenes of extraterrestrial impregnation; Seth’s anamorphosis into a fly creature in David Cronenberg’s *The Fly* (1986); and humans shapeshifting into werewolves in Neil Jordan’s *The Company of Wolves* (1984). Badley describes these films as “an agnostic ‘body language’ for a culture that perceived itself as grotesquely embodied and in transformation” (7). The metamorphosis: an apt visceral expression for a society in flux.
ART CORPOREL AND THE GROTESQUE BODY

Bakhtin described the grotesque body as unfinished and porous: “…the artistic logic of the grotesque image ignores the closed, smooth, and impenetrable surface of the body and retains only its excrescences (sprouts, buds) and orifices, only that which leads beyond the body’s limited space or into the body’s depths” (qtd. in Arya 90). Body Art (art corporel) provided an avenue that allowed the individual to engage with the body in this Bakhtinian form. The body as both “canvas” and “content” (95), object and subject, allows one to work “through the economy of sensation” (96). There was body art that focalized the body-in-pain, showing the artists cutting, gagging, starving, choking, suffocating, scratching, stabbing, mutilating, and in some rare cases, killing the body. Gina Pane’s Azione Sentimentale (Sentimental Action), which debuted in Milan in 1973, displays the artist wounding herself; in the performance, Pane is dressed in all white and sits in a fetal positon in a room of all women. She picks up the thorns from a bouquet of roses and inserts them into her arm, then cuts her palms with a razor blade and offers her blood streaked arms to the female audience as a kind of sacrifice (Chilvers and Glaves-Smith). In an interview, Pane described her piece as one that illuminated the wound that “lies at the centre of identifying, recording, and locating a certain malaise” (qtd. in Voss 42); the act of injuring is an act of excavation that brings the body-in-pain into sharp visceral focus. The female wound is articulated through “certains éléments primordiaux le lait ou le sang (certain primordial elements like milk or blood)” (qtd. in Zimmerman 33). In Nourriture, actualités télévisées, feu (Nourishment, TV News, Fire), Pane eats a large quantity of raw minced meat while burying her face in the plate and using her hands to shovel the meat it into her mouth (Jackovljevic 153); in
another sequence, she watches the news while a bright light shines on her; and in the
last, she tries to put out a fire on a hill of sand with her feet and hands. In these
sequences, “the female body does not figure as a source of completeness in contrast to
the violation and destruction of human life shown on the television screen, but it is itself
violated” (32). *Lait Chaud (Hot Milk)*, Pane’s 1972 work, is perhaps the most jarring of
her performance art pieces which display the body-in-pain. Like *Azione Sentimentale*,
Pane is dressed in white; this time she “alternate[s] between cutting herself with a razor
blade and bouncing a tennis ball against a wall” (Arya 102). She is turned away from the
audience and begins to cut her back before stopping the blade at her face. When the
piece was performed, viewers were terrified at the prospect of Pane injuring her face.
Audible yells of “No, no, not the face, no!” (qtd. in Arya 103) could be heard from the
crowd. When Pane did cut her face, she took out a camera and began to film the
audience’s reaction (103). Pane also cuts her face in the 1974 work *Psyché (Psyche)*,
where she makes incisions below her eyebrows to give the effect of bloody tears
(Gozenbach 41). The unfinished nature of performance art means that the audience is
part of the work; their involvement (“perceptual entanglement” to evoke Feldman’s
words) makes them complicit in Pane’s acts of violent transgression. The audience
screams in horror as not only witnesses but participants.

Tina Takemoto and Angela Ellsworth’s *Misfit Attire* (1992) is also a notable
example of body art which engages with the grotesque. Takemoto and Ellsworth, known
as the collaborative duo Her/She Senses, each engage in separate, parallel acts for
three hours (Ellsworth). Ellsworth eats pink Hostess snowballs, “pulls the marshmallow
tops off [them]…and stuffs them into her stocking” (Ellsworth). Takemoto described the
appearance in *Thinking Through the Skin* as “large, heavy, pink and lumpy — looking a bit like a misshapen stuffed animal or a multi-breasted goddess figure” (Takemoto 105). The overflowing stocking also bears an uncanny resemblance to adipose tissue and gives the disquieting effect of the inner viscera spilling from Ellsworth’s leg. One leg stands poised, conforming to standard; the other leg a visual pronouncement of what lies beneath the flimsy epidermis. For her part, Takemoto “sharpen[s] hundreds of wooden chopsticks in an electric pencil sharpener bound up in [her] hair” (Takemoto 105). She then takes the chopsticks and stabs them into her dress: “After three hours I had the look of a porcupine or human pincushion” (105). Takemoto refers to the chopstick stabbing as “hari-kari style” (105), evoking the Japanese ritual form of suicide by disembowelment. Takemoto calls the pieces’ “absurd displays of consumption and accumulation of materials on our bodies” as a way to “negotiate stereotypes through the presence of our bodies, how to confront scopic regimes that render ‘overweight’ and racialized, gendered bodies as other” (105). The body is the stage where Ellsworth and Takemoto enact these laborious performances and through performance call attention to the laborious weight of these “scopic regimes”.

Perhaps Ellsworth and Takemoto’s most evocative collaboration is their 1994 work *Imag(in)ed Malady*. Following Ellsworth’s diagnosis of Hodgkin’s lymphoma, Takemoto became interested in breaking Eve Sedgwick’s “ontological crack between the living and the dead” (qtd. in Takemoto 106). Skin, the surface through which we interact with the world, became a way of fostering mutuality between Ellsworth and Takemoto. Skin or “flesh” is “not understood simply as matter, but as the very sensibility of the seen, and the very sight of the sensible” (5). Takemoto describes the mode of
thinking that lead to *Imag(in)ed Malady* as using “haptic visuality” (qtd. in 6) to explore that which is internal and invisible:

What has occupied our minds since is, not only the question of overdetermined visibility, but also that of invisibility: the visible bind of the body caught within institutionalized schemes of racial and gendered subjectivity complicated by the invisibility of those territorializations that occur within bodies: the invisible and unknowable form of illness realized by the fact of illness and made vivid the moment it becomes personal. (105)

Much of the piece is explained by Lucy Irigaray’s concept of mimicry as the act of “convert[ing] a form of subordination into affirmation… so as to make ‘visible’, by an effect of playful repetition, what is supposed to remain invisible” (qtd. in Takemoto 111). The act of mimicking, therefore, becomes a way of highlighting “the inadequacy of its own repetition and demonstrates the impossibility of direct equivalence between sign and referent, self and other” (111). Cancer is ‘read’ on the skin through pallor and bruises, rashes and thinning hair. Ellsworth cannot “see the tumor shrink or the cells stop multiplying” (110); the skin is the interface where illness is marked. As Ellsworth went through treatment, she began to take polaroid photos that captured these changes on the body. One photo shows a close-up of Ellsworth’s scar following a biopsy. In the adjacent one, a close-up of Takemoto’s neck reveals a similar looking wound: an imitation made from “scotch tape, a live leech, and an office clip” (109). In *Blown Veins/Jelly Hands*, a photograph displays Ellsworth’s bandaged hand (presumably post-injection). In another photo, Ellsworth’s other arm is connected to an intravenous needle which flows down the length of the photo. After hearing of Ellsworth’s frustrations over
her frequently collapsed veins and spending days “staring down at the healthy state of [her] own hands”, Takemoto takes “raspberry jelly from a diner, [and] clear tape[s] them to [her] hands” (110). She photographs them as they “burst open”, giving the effect of a ruptured, bloody wound. Takemoto remarks that her “woundless wound…intentionally fail[s] to re-present the scars left by medical treatments” (111). Mimicry becomes a way of expressing that which can never be adequately expressed: “Re-imaging these wounds on my body using toys, food and other quotidian objects was intended to underscore our absolute inability to produce an adequate visual rhyme” (110). It’s also perhaps apt to consider the way that intentional wounding/mimicry seeks to create its own sense of embodiment; in re-staging Ellsworth’s photos does Takemoto begin to share Ellsworth’s trauma and embody her experiences? After one incident of re-imaging, Takemoto is hospitalised after burning her arm with matches “in an attempt to rhyme the cumulative effects off Angela’s chemotherapy injections” (112). After spending time in the ER, Takemoto is transferred to the psychiatric ward. She writes, “I had become so involved in the internal logic of the project that I began to lose sense of the limits of health and safety” (112). The act of re-staging is also ethically murky: is mimicry a point of identification or simply a form of appropriating another’s trauma? When audiences saw the photographs, “some viewers believed both images were of Angela whereas others feared [Takemoto] was also sick and in danger of contagion” (112); as if the mimicry of illness conjures its own sort of illness. Takemoto notes this “doubling” effect as a kind of “excess of sameness” which works to obscure “the ‘normal’ figure of the individual body” (112). If anything, the act of wounding reifies the “melancholy of illness…[which] appears as a suspended form of grief that both resists
and anticipates the possibility of loss” (119). Through re-staging, Takemoto brings melancholia — which, according to Freud, “behaves like an open wound, drawing to itself cathetic energy from all sides …and draining the ego until it is ultimately depleted” (qtd. in Takemoto116) — from the realm of “psychical interiority” to the realm of “corporeal exteriority” (qtd. in Takemoto 118). It is “through the act of wounding” — which is “the active debasement of the ego (enabled by the ability to objectify loss and then act against it) — “that the subject breaks free from loss” (117).

**SITES OF HORROR IN OCTAVIA BUTLER’S “BLOODCHILD”**

In her afterword for “Bloodchild”, Octavia Butler describes the short story’s origin as stemming from her perturbation of encountering botflies on an upcoming trip to the Peruvian Amazon. “The insect,” writes Butler, seemed to encapsulate “horror movie habits” (30). In particular, the botfly’s frightening myiasis terrified Butler and she dedicates a large portion of her afterword to describing the process in detail: “The botfly lays its eggs in wounds left by bites of other insects. I found the idea of a maggot living and growing under my skin, eating my flesh as it grew, to be so intolerable, so terrifying that I didn’t know how I could stand it if it happened to me” (30). This tension — of finding oneself the host of a parasitic creature — lies at the heart of Bloodchild. In the short story, Gan, the protagonist, lives as part of small human colony (referred to as “Terrans”) on a planet of Tlic, parasitic insect-like creatures that rely on the Terrans as hosts. When the Terrans first arrive on the planet after fleeing persecution, the Tlic enclose them in cages and use them solely as hosts — the process of impregnation involves the Tlic laying their eggs in the Terran until the organisms grow out of their
eggs and poison the host before consuming them. This process, however, is soon changed, and the Tlic create a more symbiotic relationship that involves one human from each family being “chosen” for impregnation; the Terran submits to the Tlic who uses them as a host, but the organism is removed from the host’s body before the host can be consumed. The story begins on Gan’s “last night of childhood” (3) or the night before he is to be impregnated by T’Gatoi, the Tlic assigned to their family. T’Gatoi has a close relationship with her Terran family — having “grown up” with his mother, Lien — and uses her power as a government official to protect Gan and his family from the Tlic who perceive them as nothing more than “big, warm-blooded animals” (9). On the day of the impregnation, an N’Tlic (implanted Terran) named Bram Lomas goes into labour and Gan must assist T’Gatoi in delivering the offspring. Gan is unfamiliar with the grotesque nature of the birthing process and he is repulsed to see the man in a state of horror. He is forced to hold Lomas down during the frightening caesarean section as Lomas, caged by T’Gatoi’s numerous legs, cries “helplessly” and T’Gatoi makes the first incision:

His body convulsed with the first cut. He almost tore himself away from me. The sound he made…I had never heard such sounds come from anything human.

T’Gatoi seemed to pay no attention as she lengthened and deepened the cut, now and then pausing to lick away blood. His blood vessels contracted, reacting to the chemistry of her saliva, and the bleeding slowed. (15)

Gan describes the process as enacting a kind of “torture” on Bram’s body: “It felt as though I were helping her (T’Gatoi)...consume him” (15). Following the emergence of the first larva (also referred to as “grub”), Lomas loses consciousness and Gan,
overwhelmed by his proximity to the grotesque spectacle, begins to undergo a kind of breakdown. The process of delivering the grub brings Lomas to the precipice of death:

She found the first grub. It was fat and deep red with his blood—both inside and out. It had already eaten its own egg case but apparently had not yet begun to eat its host. At this stage, it would eat any flesh except its mother's. Let alone, it would have gone on excreting the poisons that had both sickened and alerted Lomas. Eventually it would have begun to eat. By the time it ate its way out of Lomas's flesh, Lomas would be dead or dying — and unable to take revenge on the thing that was killing him. (15)

The effect of encountering the abject not only elicits a sense of nausea — Gan states that “[he] knew [he] would vomit soon” (15) — but it defamiliarizes his relationship with T’Gatoi whom he previously regarded as a “mate/maternal figure” (Thibodeau 270). The implantation, which he once believed was “a good and necessary thing Tlic and Terran did together — a kind of birth” (Butler 16), now appears “wrong, alien” (15). Gan states: “I knew birth was painful and bloody, no matter what. But this was something else, something worse. And I wasn’t ready to see it. Maybe I never would be. Yet I couldn’t not see it. Closing my eyes didn’t help” (16-17). The birth, like Hatoum’s Corps Étranger, gives Gan a glimpse into a sight that is meant to be concealed. When he speaks to his brother Qui on the matter, Gan says that “it’s not supposed to happen that way” to which Qui responds: “Sure it is. You weren’t supposed to see it, that’s all.” (21).

In an effort to dissuade the encroaching sense of abjection, Gan urges T’Gatoi to ask him permission to implant him. Amanda Thibodeau contends that “in demanding that she acknowledge his choice, Gan forces T’Gatoi to recognize the parasitic nature of
their relationship and opens up the possibility of becoming a new kind of subject” (270-271). In asserting that he does not “want to be a host animal” (Butler 24), Gan attempts to enact a sense of agency over a fundamentally “unequal relationship” (Thibodeau 270). Yet the question remains whether “equality” is possible in a Tlic/Terran relationship that positions the human as a host to carry (potentially lethal) organisms. Heather Humann argues that Butler complicates the supposedly “symbiotic” nature of the relationship by also showing that the humans receive benefits from the Tlic’s “sterile eggs” which have “narcotic, medicinal, and restorative properties” that endow the humans with “comfort, health, and in many cases, an unnaturally long life span” (521). When Gan finally submits to T’Gatoi telling her to “do it [the implantation] to [him]” (Butler 26), T’Gatoi’s response further underscores the ambivalent nature of their relationship when she answers, “I must do it to someone tonight” (27). Gan’s reply, “Don’t you care who?” is purposefully unanswered and its implications linger in the air as T’Gatoi implants her egg into Gan’s body. The scene is infused with a sort of eroticism, and the inversed gender parallels in the short story (T’Gatoi as “masculine” and Gan as “feminine”) reach an apex. Gan lies, undressed and passive, as T’Gatoi “punctures” him with her “ovipositor” (27). T’Gatoi remarks (reinforcing a previous sentiment) that “Terrans should be protected from seeing” (28) since she does not want Gan to “shoot” her or kill himself in a fit of terror. What T’Gatoi’s comment illuminates is the way witnessing the abject re-illuminates the parasitic nature of the relationship. It is only after Gan delivers the Tlic from Lomas’s body and witnesses a sight “too grotesque to behold” that he questions his relationship with T’Gatoi; that she then becomes an alien.
CHAPTER 4: A NEW CORPOREAL REALITY

SOMATIC NOSTALGIA & THE BREAST PROSTHESIS

In the chapter “A Skin of One’s Own” of Second Skins, Jay Prosser uses the term “bodily nostalgia” to describe “the memory of the somatotype that should have been” (94). Following trauma, illness, or injury, where the body has undergone a profound alteration, somatic nostalgia manifests as a desire to “return”, to bring the body back to a previous corporeal state/reality. If nostalgia places the body in the “precarious position between memory (the lived experience of the past) and imagination (anticipation of restoring memory’s exigency)” (Bartkuviené 87) then bodily nostalgia is compounded by the “memory” of a former corporeal reality and the displacement of the current corporeal reality by the former. When Elizabeth Grosz speaks of phantomization — often noted as the feeling of sensation in an amputated limb — she describes it as “an expression of nostalgia for the unity and wholeness of the body, its completion. It is a memorial to the missing limb, a psychical delegate that stands in its place” (qtd. in Prosser 84).

Phantomization is an “inverse of agnosia” where “the phenomenon of the phantom limb represents the remembering in the body image of parts actually lost from the material body” (84). The phantom limb/organ has been extensively recorded by physicians, although there is still widespread disagreement to its exact causes9, but Prosser and Grosz evoke it in their readings to highlight the way phantomization exists as an articulation of somatic nostalgia; in other words, phantomization is the literalization of

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9The previous accepted etiology that the sensation arises from the “irritation of the severed nerve endings” has been complicated by recent brain imaging scans which indicate the involvement of the central nervous system. An article in the NCBI notes: “Imaging studies such as MRI and PET scans show activity in the areas of the brain associated with the amputated limb when the patient feels phantom pain. The pain is now thought to involve many peripheral and central nervous system factors (Hanyu-Deutmeyer and Varacallo)
the grief of the missing limb/organ which bespeaks the absent body part: “a feeling of presence that remains in its very absence” (84).

    Prosser argues that surgical prosthesis, the process of reconstructing the missing body part, assuages the ache of somatic nostalgia. Audre Lorde goes as far to say that “somatic nostalgia” is exacerbated by (and, in many ways, born from) the emphasis upon surgical prosthesis. In her autobiographical text *The Cancer Journals*, published in 1980, Lorde details her experiences with breast cancer and partial mastectomy. Following the discovery of a tumor in her right breast, Lorde writes of the growing “anger” she felt towards her breast and its “betrayal” of the body: “…[It] is as if it had…become separate from me and had turned against me by creating this tumor which might be malignant. My beloved breast had suddenly departed from the rules we had agreed upon to function all these years” (33). When the tumor’s malignancy is discovered, Lorde is faced with the prospect of a partial mastectomy. On the day before her mastectomy, Lorde expresses the profound mourning that accompanies a loss of (and from) the body, writing in a journal entry: “And yet if I cried for a hundred years I couldn’t possibly express the sorrow I feel right now, the sadness and the loss” (35). The loss of the breast is totalizing yet Lorde describes her detest of the way “cosmetic reassurance” is quickly given to post-mastectomy women as a way to fill that loss: “Any woman who has had a breast removed because of cancer knows she does not feel the same. But we are allowed no psychic time or space to examine what our true feelings are, to make them our own. With quick cosmetic reassurance, we are told that our feelings are not important, our appearance is all, the sum total of self” (57). This “cosmetic reassurance” comes in a “blush-pink nylon envelope with a slighter, darker
apex…shaped like a giant slipper-shell” (44). When Lorde puts it on, she does not feel a sense of “wholeness” (i.e. that the form is adequately filling in the gap of her missing breast), rather, the form re-affirms the absence of the breast that it is trying to replace: “It perched on my chest askew, awkwardly inert and lifeless, and having nothing to do with any me I could possibly conceive of” (44). Prosser contends that Lorde’s resistance to the form cannot be divorced “from her initial, visceral psychic refusal (or failure) to incorporate into body image the cloth prosthesis immediately on offer” (95) since the “pinkness” of the form materially emphasizes a racial distance that further alienates Lorde from herself (“…it looked grotesquely pale through the cloth of my bra” (44)). When Lorde takes the form off, she regards herself as “strange and uneven and peculiar” yet somehow, all the more herself: “For not even the most skillful of prosthesis in the world could undo that reality or feel the way my breast had felt” (44). It is not only that the surgical form, or the more permanent breast implant, can never return the body to what it was — since, arguably, the moment the surgical tool makes contact with the body is the formation of a new corporeal reality — but that the breast prosthesis reinforces the metonymy of breast equals woman. Unlike dentures or artificial limbs, where “function is the main point of their existence… […] false breasts are designed for appearance only” (63). The gaze becomes centralized in the function of breast prostheses where “the (male) onlooker” is of primary concern: “[it’s about] how they look and feel to others, rather than how they to feel to ourselves, and how we wish to use them” (64).
Lorde further highlights prostheses as a way to silence the affective responses that arise from cancer and surgery\(^\text{10}\): “The emphasis upon wearing a prosthesis is a way of avoiding having women come to terms with their own pain and loss, and thereby, with their own strength” (49). The breast prosthesis diminishes the “bodily experience of cancer” (Prosser 94), and “offers the empty comfort of “Nobody will know the difference”” (Lorde 61). The “difference”, however, is what Lorde argues must be reckoned with, since the “gap” left by the surgically removed breast is “filled with death – real death, the fact of it” (53). This encounter with death reanimates, rather than diminishes, the present — “… [it] heightens and sharpens…living” — and Lorde uses it to consider a new way of reconciling with the post-surgical body: “Breast cancer, with its mortal awareness, and the amputation, which it entails, can still be a gateway, however cruelly won, into the tapping and expansion of my own power and knowing” (53-54).

The act of reckoning with the pain, grief, and loss of breast cancer and mastectomy, and the transmutation of it through language (e.g. journal entries, essays, etc.), gives Lorde a purposeful way of reckoning with her new corporeal reality and endows her with a sense of power. It is the corporeal reality of the post-surgical body that Lorde argues must first be dealt with, rather than supplanting it via the breast prosthesis with the nostalgia of (artificially) returning the body to what it “once was”; as if cancer were a thing to be quickly traversed, buried, and forgotten.

\(^{10}\) Although, Lorde notes that she does not take issue with women receiving breast prostheses – so long as they are given the “chance to accept her new (post-surgical) body” (63) and that they come to the decision freely and on their own terms.
LUCY GREALY: (RE)CONSTRUCTION & THE ORIGINAL FACE

In 1994, Lucy Grealy published her seminal memoir, *Autobiography of a Face*. In an interview with Charlie Rose shortly after the book’s publication, Grealy described the memoir as primarily “a book about identity” (1:37-1:39) and the profound feeling of alienation that comes from “looking different” (2:31-2:32). The book details her experiences with cancer (Ewing’s sarcoma at age 9 followed by numerous rounds of chemotherapy and radiation) and the aftermath of (re)construction — both of her jaw, which was partially removed as the site of her tumor, and her “self”, which, as Grealy states, would become renegotiated after the change in her appearance. Prosser reads Lorde’s *The Cancer Journals* and Grealy’s *Autobiography of a Face* as texts that evoke the “emotional and psychic pain around a body noncoincident with body image” (93); each writer (to use Prosser’s words in reference to Braidotti) works “toward [regaining] integrity” (84) and their texts evoke a sense of “urgency to reformulate the unity” of the self (qtd. in Prosser 92).

It is the face that Grealy attempts to “refigure” (to evoke Susan Mintz’s essay on the memoir) — textually (through the act of writing and tracing its “autobiography”) and surgically (through reconstructing the jaw). Grealy regards the face as not a synecdoche that stands in for the self but the total of self: “my face, my ‘self’” (170), she notes in one passage. Mintz contends that through the conception of the face as self “Grealy suggests that there is no way to disentangle the physical from the psychical…She is her body, so far as we come to know her through text” (173). If the pulse is what reaffirms one’s “alive” status, then the face is what reaffirms one’s ontological status — that
which one looks to in order to substantiate one’s existence\textsuperscript{11}. In a key passage from the prologue, Grealy further circumscribes her face as the locus of self: “The singularity of meaning – I was my face, I was ugliness – though sometimes unbearable, also offered a possible point of escape. It became the launching pad from which to lift off, the one immediately recognizable place to point to when asked what was wrong with my life. Everything led to it, everything receded from it — my face as personal vanishing point” (7).

Grealy perceives the missing jaw as “ontological lack” (Mintz 175) and the reconstruction of the face is imbued with “ontic potential”. If Lacanian desire is born out of lack (Ruti 488), then the “lack” of the current corporeal reality manifests the desire for the recognition of self via the reconstructed face. This desire (which is always fantasy) is reminiscent of somatic nostalgia, since Grealy expresses a desire to “return” to her “original face” (157), the corporeal reality that never was. With the prospect of surgery, Grealy begins to imagine her “original face” as the real face and her current disfigured face as the “unreal” face or impostor, superimposing the “original face” onto her current one:

Maybe this wasn’t my actual face at all but the face of some interloper, some ugly intruder, and my ‘real’ face, the one I was meant to have all along, was within reach. I began to imagine my ‘original’ face… I believed that if none of this had happened to me, I would have been beautiful. I looked in the mirror closely and imagined the lower half of my face filled out, normal. Reaching my hand up, I covered my chin and jaw, and yes, even I could see that the rest of my face was

\textsuperscript{11} This is also predicated on a visual-centric reading of the self as connected to the face.
really beautiful. As soon as I took my hand away, the ugliness of the lower half
cancelled out the beauty of the upper half, but now this didn’t matter so much: it
was all going to be ‘fixed’. (157)
The somatic nostalgia of the “original face” is assuaged by the prospect of the upcoming
operation — although the surgery does not fill the gap of ontological lack but enlarges
it. Prosser argues that “phantomization renders nameable” (88) what is yet to exist and
that the process of phantomization is actually integral to the “animation” of the surgical
prosthesis since “in order to use a replacement artificial limb, the amputee needs to
appropriate the prosthesis as his or her own” (85). Grealy “phantomizes” the “imaginary
reconstructed face (which is the “original face”) and posits reconstruction as a way of
becoming (and returning to) her “original” face (88).

Hours following the first surgery — which involves a graft taken from the groin
and attached to the jaw (156) — Grealy asks a nurse to “describe” her new face and
after the nurse notes that it is “bruised” and subject to change, Grealy asks for a mirror
so she can see herself. She notes that “‘swollen’ was an understatement”, to describe
her post-surgical face: “This new thing on my face was huge, almost touching my
collarbone. What repulsed me most was a large strip of foreign skin, much paler than
my facial skin, running along the lower half of my new jaw line. Surrounded by dozens
of minute stitches, it looked just like it was, a patch” (171). Grealy describes the post-
surgical face as “foreign” and remedies this disconnection through imagining a future
corporeal reality where her real (desired) face emerges: “I projected my thinking forward
to the next operation, the one that would fix this one” (172). Future operations bring
about similar outcomes: Grealy imagines the surgery as the formation of/return to self,
only to be discouraged when the result is that her face is “no different from before” (179). The successive “free flap operations” are also compounded by the arduous nature of grafts and the reality of necrosis — cell death of the transplanted tissue. To restore the “unity” of the body, the body must become fragmented; a dismembering that is (re)membering. Grealy describes one procedure as a “six to eight hours long” affair that transplants tissues from the hip, leaving in its wake an unrecognizable site: “…where they had taken the graft, there was a long row of thirty or forty large metal staples. It looked as if someone had sawed my leg off and then put it back on with an office stapler” (197). The post-reconstructive face is also perceived as aberrant, since the graft “had been applied…from one ear to the next and was obscenely swollen to the size of a football” (200). The graft, however, is ultimately “reabsorbed, [just] as the last one had been” (204), and Grealy is left with “the scarred donor site” as the sole somatic remembrance of its existence.

One surgery, a bone graft, gives Grealy a semblance of her “real face”. The bone graft is different from the free-flap since it is “nonvascularized, meaning a lump of bone would be taken from [the] hip, ground up, and then, like clay, fashioned into the rough shape of a jaw” (204). The results of the surgery are “immediately apparent and remarkable” partially due to bone’s lack of swelling (204). Grealy describes the euphoria when she first glimpses at her new face: “I remember limping out of bed to the bathroom and not believing my own eyes as I swung open the door. Could that really be me? For weeks afterward I kept putting my hand up and checking to make sure it was still there, an actual jaw. For the first time in memory, I actually looked forward to seeing myself in the mirror, seeing a face I liked” (204). Although the surgery is successful in its aim of
reconstructing the missing jaw, Grealy does not feel the sense of fulfillment that reconstruction was “supposed” to endow — i.e. the filling of the ontological lack of self. Was the new face not supposed to bring with it the dissolution of “fear” and the promise of “love”; “wasn’t life supposed to work now?” (204) When the bone graft begins to reabsorb in a similar fashion to the previous grafts, Grealy describes it as “reality…relentlessly manifesting itself again” (208). The ephemerality of the “reconstructed” face makes it a kind of “fantasy” that becomes necroded by the corporeal reality reasserting itself.

By this time, Grealy is feeling “abject” and decides to temporarily move to Berlin after graduating from the Iowa Writers’ Workshop. When her sister calls one day to suggest she try “a new method for plastic surgery” which involves a “tissue expander…followed by a vascularized bone graft” (214), Grealy feels “doubtful” and highlights the discernable difference between the reality of surgical reconstruction and the projected fantasy: “People were always telling me about the ‘wonderful things they can do today.’ It was difficult explaining to them — even apologizing for the fact — that plastic surgery wasn’t like the movies. There was never a dramatic moment when the bandages came off, nor a single procedure that would make it all right” (214). Although Grealy is aware that the surgery might prove to be unsuccessful and a return to “familiar disappointment,” she is unable to dissuade its possible success: “…how could I pass up the possibility that it might work, that at long last I might finally fix my face, my life, my soul” (215). The tissue graft — “an empty balloon…inserted under the skin…and then slowly blown up by daily injections of a few milliliters of saline solution into a special port beside [her] ear” (215) — is removed after complications emerge in surgery, and a
bone graft is taken from her hip and put in its place (she notes that the surgery temporarily affects her mobility). When the graft starts to shrink, Grealy has another tissue expander put in, which is successful. Following this surgery, she describes her inability to reconcile with this “end point” of reconstruction since the reformation of the jaw does not bring about the desired recognition of self:

Something was wrong: was this the face I had waited through eighteen years and almost thirty operations? I couldn’t make what I saw in the mirror correspond to the person I thought I was. It wasn’t only that I continued to feel ugly; I simply could not conceive of the image as belonging to me. I had known this feeling before, but that had been when my face was ‘unfinished,’ when I still had a large gap where my jaw should have been… There were still some minor operations, but for the most part it was over. Was this it? How could this be? Even as people confirmed that this was now my face, even as people congratulated me, I felt that I was being mistaken for someone else. The person in the mirror was an imposter — why could anyone else see this? (219-220)

Since the “real face” is the somatic nostalgia of the “original face” (perpetually contained in an imaginary past), the point of completion illuminates its inexistence and, as Sylvia Brown notes, Grealy reaches a kind of “impasse”. Brown contends that “the resistance of her face to physical stability and the cultural demands for physical perfection leave [Grealy] with a fragmented identity, one that is radically unfixed even as it is radically overdetermined” (311). The face becomes an intruder that profoundly separates her from herself. “The insight that one might treat the body as a signifier capable of multiple interpretations does not help Grealy either, as alternative viewpoints either replicate
essentializing assumptions about her identity (i.e., her fate as monster or outsider) or involve the repression of basic desires for happiness and love” (311). Grealy’s solution to reaching this point is to disregard her image altogether. She begins to avoid mirrors and regards her life as containing a kind of emptiness “without the framework of when my face gets fixed, then I’ll start living” (221). Grealy then experiences a kind of epiphany in a café in Berlin when she begins to “miss” an innate part of her, “one that had always been there, organically” (221). The revelation does not bring with it an “eternal” truth, since, as Grealy notes, “most truths are inherently unretainable” and that even “the most basic things” must be continuously rearticulated, reformulated, and re(con)figured (222). It does, however, illuminate the tenuous nature of “wholeness” which Grealy paradoxically reaffirms through “holding on to at least a personal sense of essence” (Brown 314). Although the ending effectively collapses any essentialist reading of the body by ending the memoir at a climactic moment where Grealy is just about to look at her reflection12, Susan Mintz notes that this effectively “keeps the story of the female body in motion” rather than reaffirming “an essential femaleness” (qtd. in Brown 314). The end of the memoir suggests, rather than procures, a reckoning with the corporeal reality; Grealy is at the precipice, ready to look again and see if she can “now, recognize [herself]” (223). Interestingly, Grealy’s (re)acquaintance with self emerges from the spectral position of facelessness (when she has abandoned the mirror entirely). As Sylvia Brown aptly notes in her analysis of Autobiography of a Face’s conclusion: it is “a death (of an old social construction) and a rebirth (of an

12 Grealy ends the book at the café where she is engaging in a conversation with a man when “it suddenly occur[s] to [her] that it is no mistake when sometimes in film and literature the dead know they are dead only after being offered that most irrefutable proof: they can no longer see themselves in a mirror (222). She then looks out “at the window behind him…to see if [she] could, now, recognize myself” (223).
identity both new and familiar), an instant of liminality, as [Grealy] poises on the threshold between essence and construction, fixity and radical openness, repression and confrontation” (312).

**FRANJU, TESHIGAHARA, AND THE FACE**

There are a lot of startling similarities between Georges Franju’s 1960 film *Les Yeux sans Visage* (*Eyes Without a Face*) and Hiroshi Teshigahara’s 1966 film *Tanin no kao* (*The Face of Another*) which merit a reading of the two together. Besides the obvious thematic similarity of a character undergoing facial reconstruction following a disfiguring accident (automobile and workplace respectively), both films are adapted from novels. *Eyes Without a Face* derives from the 1959 novel by French writer Jean Redon, adapted for film by Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcejac, “co-writers best remembered for books that inspired Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* and Clouzot’s *Les Diaboliques*” (Geroulanos 16). *The Face of Another* is adapted from the 1964 existential novel by the well-known Japanese writer Kōbō Abe. The film adaptation of *The Face of Another* marks the third collaboration between Abe and Teshigahara, the two previous ones being *Pitfalls* (1962) and *Woman in the Dunes* (1964) — with the latter often considered Teshigahara’s magnum opus (Quandt). Both *Eyes Without a Face* and *The Face of Another* received unfavourable critical reviews upon release. Initially, reviews of *Eyes Without a Face* “ranged from condescending to contemptuous to outright hostile” and many theatregoers in France and Scotland “had to be stretchered out after fainting” (Wheatley). Part of the criticism of the film came from Franju’s seemingly abrupt pivot “from court-métrage (*Hôtel des Invalides, Le Grand Méliès*) to genre filmmaking” which French critics believed was a “descent from auteurist (and socially committed)
filmmaking into a populist genre" — in particular, Jean-Luc Godard described Franju’s foray into horror as “saddening” and a “self-burial in conventional productions, in five-finger exercises of style, and in Selected Classics” (Wheatley). The goriness of the film repulsed British critics and was called a cheap imitation of German expressionism by French critics (Wheatley). “It was not until the 1986 re-release of the film in conjunction with retrospectives at the National Film Theatre (NFT) and Cinématheque Française of Franju’s back catalogue that its status within the history of French cinema began to be re-evaluated” (Wheatley). Teshigahara’s The Face of Another was “a success in Japan” although a critical failure abroad. In his review of the film for the official Criterion Collection DVD release, James Quantz surmises that the film’s dismissal “by Western critics” may have come from “its modernist style, which was becoming increasingly unfashionable” at the time. One reviewer stated the film was “more grotesque than emotionally compelling” (qtd. in Sutandio 67). Decades later, The Face of Another still remains relatively obscure, especially in reference to the critical and commercial success of Woman in the Dunes. But perhaps the most evocative point of comparison between the films are their explorations of post-war anxieties and the tenuous formation of identity. Eyes Without a Face is filled with the gueules cassées of WWI and The Face of Another with the hibakusha of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In both films, the reconstruction of the face is emblematically tied to the reconstruction of nation following the trauma of war. The journey towards refiguration is a desire to return to a self (nation) that no longer exists; a self (nation) obliterated and reckoning with its new corporeal (material, psychological, ontological) reality.
To further analyze each of the film’s relation to the face, it is necessary to first tease out what the face is/means. Atsuko Sakaki calls the face “an aporia” (369) which is at once “peripheral, both in physical and metaphysical terms” (369) and central, since it is “the site on which identity markers display themselves” (370). The face is both evocative of the superficial — since terms related to the face “all connote relative insignificance” (370) — and emblematic of depth. The face is posited as the surface which, as Susan Stewart notes, “reveals a depth and profundity which the body itself is not capable of…because the eyes and to some degree the mouth are openings onto fathomlessness” (qtd. in Sakaki 370). The face often merits literary comparisons (Stewart calls this “the great topoi of Western literature” (371)) since we read faces like a book, parsing for a deeper meaning or hidden evocation. But a face, unlike a book, is dynamic and constantly changing: its “meaning is complicated by a constant series of alterations between a reader and author who is strangely disembodied, neither present nor absent, found in neither part nor whole, but, in fact, created by the reading” (qtd. in Sakaki 371). Sakaki notes, however, that although the face is thought to “encapsulate the essence of its owner and, thus, invite interpretation” (371), the interpretation of the face is always in a constant state of reconstruction “between the two parties, the viewer and the viewed” (371). Merleau-Ponty reads this “écart (gap)” between the two parties as one of “perception” … [which is] also an envelopment or co-emergence that engenders an inexhaustible depth of sense to be explored” (Mazis xi). In other words, the face “draws us beyond personal boundaries and propels us into a transcendence of self” (xi).
The mode by which Franju and Teshigahara interact with the reconstruction of the face differs. *Eyes Without a Face*, classified as a horror film, brings reconstruction to its edge, displaying a doctor (Génissier) desperate to restore his daughter’s (Christiane’s) face after she is injured in a car crash at his hand. Dr. Génissier and his assistant Louise kidnap girls who bear a similar countenance to Christiane and forcibly remove their faces (in a highly gruesome fashion) to use as heterografts. The face is the object at the control of Dr. Génissier who prods, incises, tears, and assemblages at his own will. The *papier-mâché* like mask Christiane wears never passes for a face, and aside from one brief scene, all the heterografts are rejected. The psychiatrist (Hira) of *The Face of Another* is reminiscent of Dr. Génissier in his singular focus towards restoring the face of his patient (Okuyama), yet the mask, which functions as the heterograft, is a science-fiction-esque creation that gives Okuyama a realistic looking face of another man without any of the complicating factors of a real biological face transplant (i.e. rejection, necrosis, blood, scars). The face is that which individuates; when Okuyama wears the “face of another” he effectively becomes the other; the mask erases his own specificity and he takes on the specificity of another.

**EYES WITHOUT A FACE & THE RETURN TO THE ‘VRAI VISAGE’**

*Eyes Without a Face* begins in medias res: Génissier’s assistant, Louise, drives down a dark winding road wearing a Marion Crane-esque expression. The shot is accompanied by Maurice Jarre’s haunting score which heightens the disquieting mood of the scene. As Louise drives through shadowy streets, there is the shot of a figure

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13 The character from Hitchcock’s *Psycho*. I am particularly referencing the scene where Marion drives her car towards Bates Motel, the dark shadow casting a sinister glow.
sitting in the backseat and in the next shot, Louise stops at the edge of the Seine and throws the figure – revealed to be a disguised corpse — into the water. The film then cuts to Dr. Génessier giving a lecture on heterografts. He tells the bemused audience that the main obstacle to transplanting living tissue is rejection. The only way to counteract rejection is through intense radiation – a process Génessier notes, “no human being can survive” (7:14-7:16). In a chilling close-up of Génessier’s face, he states that the solution to irradiation is to exsanguinate the subject, draining every drop of their blood. Génessier’s explanation of heterografts is reminiscent of Rosi Braidotti’s notion of “‘organs without bodies’: a nightmarish vision of the biosciences’ production of an ever more dismembered, fragmented body” (qtd. in Prosser 92). To achieve “physical rejuvenation” (Génessier’s words), the subject must be drained of life; the heterograft, a re-embodiment that disembodies.

The premise of the film is filled in slowly; the corpse at the start of the film — initially believed to be that of Christiane, who has been reported missing for weeks — is in fact, another girl, one who’s face has been used for a (failed) heterograft to restore Christiane’s face. The real Christiane lies listlessly in her room, dressed in a white peignoir and shut away from the world by her father/doctor. Stefanos Geroulanos aptly calls Christiane “the living dead” (15) since she is presumed to be “dead” to the world but looms as a sort of spectre to her fiancée Jacque, a student of Dr. Génèssier’s who regards Christiane’s sudden disappearance with suspicion. Christiane’s face is never shown in her entrance (aside from one blurry shot, the viewer never sees her face), it can only be assemblaged from the expressions of Génessier and Louise, their singular
insistence for her to wear her mask, and in a climactic moment, Edna’s shrill shriek of horror when she encounters her at the foot of the surgical bed.

When the viewer finally sees Christiane’s face it is hidden behind the mask: a white, opaque, plastic mold that obscures her expression; only her eyes gleam behind it like “eyes without a face”. When Génessier reassures Christiane that he will be successful in giving her “a real face” (23:25) *(ton vrai visage)*, he evokes a phrase popularized during the Nazi occupation of France. Joan Hawkins explains this context further:

Dr. Génessier mutilates women in order to restore his daughter her true face, “*ton vrai visage,*” he tells Christiane [Edith Scob]. But ‘vrai visage’ is the term French Nazi sympathizers used during the war to describe French racial and national purity… And the question here, as in occupied France, is precisely how many people must be removed, how many people must be tortured and killed, to ‘restore’ a true French face, a ‘vrai visage’ that is always, it seems, constructed from the skin of the Other. (qtd. in Bowman)

The “*vrai visage*” is evocative of Grealy’s “real face”, a face that only exists in some distant imagination. Yet the implications of searching for the real face are anything but imaginary; countless girls are rendered ‘casualties’ in the name of the *vrai visage.*

Génessier’s speech at the start of the film eerily mirrors the evocation of “French racial and national purity” when he notes that the perfect heterograft is predicated on biological homogeneity. Some critics also note the allusions to Josef Mengele, a German physician noted for his unethical human experimentation at Auschwitz — Génessier’s skin graft testing on German shepherds also presumably serves as a visual
reference to the canines of the concentration camps. Geroulanos suggests that more deeply, the film uses the motifs of the War(s) to examine post-war reconstruction in a modern world. The disfigured soldiers of WWI (gueules cassées) that returned to France following the war were often abjected from a nation who viewed them as material reminders of a horror they were trying to suppress:

Following World War I, the presence and shock posed by facial mutilées turned the figure of the destroyed face into a crucial description of the effect of the Great War on man's image itself. Not only did mutilées themselves – not to mention families and hospital staff – have to struggle to find a place for themselves amidst a society that could no longer hide them; but policies of skin grafting and prostheses contributed greatly to the dual sense of man as having come undone by modern technological culture and being stitched back together thanks to it. (Geroulanos 23)

It's also important to note that Génessier uses female bodies for heterografts, a stark gender inversion of the male gueules cassées. Adam Lowenstein argues that the use of female subjects is a deliberate aesthetic distancing of death from “the masculine artist and community of survivors”, who are now able to “repress” the “knowledge of the reality of death” since it “occurs at someone else's body and as an image” (qtd. in Lowenstein 51). The female is thus abject in the name of reconstruction and formation of national identity in a modern world. It is this post-war modern world which inadvertently (or purposefully) leads to the dismemberment and death of Edna Grüber, a young Swiss woman who is kidnapped by Louise and forced to undergo a harrowing face transplant before falling to her death from the window of Génessier's home. Louise
finds Edna alone in Paris, the epicenter of culture and identity, waiting in line for a film. She offers her a free ticket and Edna graciously accepts — she initially balks at the ticket since it is in the “expensive” section and she was planning to sit in the cheaper area. Later, Louise offers Edna employment at Génessier’s secluded château and in an uncanny driving sequence which mirrors the opening shot of the film, Edna is unknowingly brought to the lair of Dr. Génessier.

The surgical scene, the most horror inducing scene of the film, is heightened by the lengthy affair of Edna’s kidnapping, drugging, and strapping onto a surgical bed. When Génessier enters in his surgical garb, the horror of the film reaches its acme. The six-minute scene is frightening in its arduousness. There is no musical score nor sound effects. The images display a deliberate and calculative process: the slow tracing of the face with a pencil, the line of inky black blood that drips (but does not gush) from the scalpel, the forceps arranged around the circumference of the face, poised to remove the epidermal layer. The shots are interspersed with Dr. Génessier’s sweating brow and laboured breathing, and Louise’s worried expression. Lowenstein argues that the scene’s focus on details “invokes the science film” with its shots of “the powerful surgical lamps, the adjustment of the gloves and masks, the metallic sheen of the operating tables, the sleek shape of the scalpel” (46). The removal of the face (the faint inducing scene) is terrifying in its slow reveal; the brief shot of the dark, bloodied layer underneath is quickly glanced over before the scene fades to black. The doubling of the opening scene comes after Edna jumps to her death and her corpse is dragged and thrown like the disguised figure at the start of the film.
Christiane’s new face is evocative of Grealy’s writings on the bone graft that gave a brief semblance of her “real face”. Christiane’s visage has been restored and her father/doctor and Louise praise her new “angelic” face — it is also revealed later in the film that Louise herself “owes” her face to Dr. Génessier; the only evidence of the surgery being a small scar concealed by a string of pearls. Christiane notes that she feels like she is “looking at someone who looks like [her] but seems to come from the Beyond” (1:01:00 – 1:01:07). In a later scene, Génessier pulls up Christiane’s hair to take a closer look at her face and the scar from the transplant is nothing more than a faint shadow. Génessier’s fearful look is realized in the next scene (an aesthetic and tonal shift in the film), displaying Christiane in a sequence of images that recall the medical photographs of the gueules cassées at the Val de Grâce hospital (Pichel 26). The tissue has been rejected; the necrosis is shown through a time lapse of photos. In another doubling shot, Christiane puts on the mask and Louise returns to Paris, scoping for her next victim.

The fate of the last girl, however, is reversed. Dr. Génessier is questioned by police on the whereabouts of Paulette Méronon — a young woman presumed to be discharged from the clinic earlier that evening after undergoing a psychiatric evaluation. Paulette, however, is strapped to the operating table and about to undergo a face transplant. Christiane cuts her free with a scalpel and then uses the same scalpel to murder Louise, stabbing her at the entry point that conceals the beginning of her ‘new self’. Christiane also frees all of the caged dogs, who, in a frightening re-assertion of power, attack Dr. Génessier and eat his face and body, leaving him as “eyes without a face”. In the final shot of the film, the masked Christiane creeps over his body like the
female narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper”, accompanied by Jarre’s eerie score and a (now freed) flock of pigeons.

WEARING THE FACE (MASK) OF ANOTHER

_The Face of Another_ opens with a question: “Recognize these?” (0:43-0:45) asks a voice reminiscent of Ebrahim Golestan in _The House is Black_. The screen then displays a range of disembodied parts: hands, ears, fingers, eyes, all recognizable to the viewer as parts of their own body. The narrator then defamiliarizes the seemingly ordinary body parts, revealing that they are, in fact, prostheses before demonstrating by pulling the finger off a realistic form of a hand. The opening of _The Face of Another_ is filled with disembodiment: the body parts isolated from the bodies they derive from, the questioning voice of Dr. Hira (the psychiatrist) divorced from his body, the close-up shots of Mrs. Okuyama’s nose and mouth before the camera finally zooms out to reveal her full face, and the speaking X-rayed image of Mr. Okuyama describing the circumstances of the laboratory chemical explosion that burned his face. Okuyama’s face is covered by bandages, visually resonant of Dr. Jack Griffins in the 1933 film _The Invisible Man_ — also notably a chemist whose bandages conceal a workplace accident and subsequent invisibility functions as its own kind of mask (Brown 166). _The Face of Another_ also bears a similar conflict with _The Invisible Man_ in the fractured marital relationship between Okuyama and his wife. Okuyama is shown to be irritable and goading, waxing philosophically in language reminiscent of Frankenstein’s monster while sitting in a dark room, since “a man without a face is free only when darkness rules the world” (7:13 -7:19). At one point, Okuyama tries to make a sexual advance in
the dark which his wife rejects. “It was just too sudden” (9:37 - 9:39) she remarks, yet her forcible distance from Okuyama is palpable.

Atsuko Sakaki notes the tension in the film “between the seduction of the surface and the obsession with depth” (372), the face as “a layer of skin, a surface” (8:37-8:42) and the face as the locus of self. Okuyama construes the face as more than a surface, arguing that its absence corrodes the soul: “The face is the door to the soul. When it is closed off, so too is the soul. Nobody is allowed inside. The soul is left to rot, reduced to ruins. It becomes the soul of a monster, rotten to the core.” (8:47 - 9:04). When the face is disfigured, the self is “buried alive” (9:06-9:09). This view of the face is also countered by the belief of the face’s superficiality: “the face is just a dozen square inches above the neck, covered with a layer of dough. Isn’t that right?” (8:15- 8:29). When Okuyama asks for time off to figure out if he’s “qualified” to continue working, his boss expresses this reading of the face, stating that the accident does not change who he is innately: “You’re the same person. What’s there to figure out?” (11:50 - 11:54).

Okuyama commissions Dr. Hira (for 10,000 yen) to make him a mask which will give him the appearance of a realistic visage. The surrealist space of the doctor’s office with its abstract reflective walls covered in Langer’s lines, hanging isolated body parts, and frightening contraptions, is the apt locale for Okuyama to undergo this metamorphosis; its unique design emblematizes its liminality, imbuing it with an almost other-worldly air, and the tilting camera shots heighten the disorienting nature of Okuyama’s transformation. The mask itself is made from a tissue-like substance (“close to that of the skin’s cellular tissue” (23:24-23:26)) and molded from the face of another man. It is at once startling in its verisimilitude and “alien and false” (Sutandio 65) in its
concealment of Okuyama’s real biological face. Dr. Hira, allusive to Victor Frankenstein, is marvelled by his creation, yet he warns Okuyama that the mask is its own entity which possesses the power to assert itself. Dr. Hira seems to express the Deleuzean and Guttarian concept of faciality which argues that “one does not have a face, one slides into one: faces choose their subjects” (Brown 158). Steven Brown describes Dr. Hira’s assertions of the mask’s power as evocative of the Japanese noh masks which did “not disguise the face of the actor” but rather made them “become the face of the other through the spirit of the mask” (169). The mask then is “affixed” not just worn, and the actor “performs a ceremonial donning of the mask (in a mirrored room) before going onstage” (169-170).

In the doctor’s office, “every frozen emotion finds its icy image reflected, fragmented, distorted, multiplied in a mirrored surface of glass, Lucite, or metal” (Quandt). The Face of Another is heavily filled with the motif of doubling, much like Eyes Without a Face. The many instances of doubling, repetition, reflected images, doppelgängers and coupling reaffirms the “bifurcated” nature of the film. There’s “the Viennese waltz” in the opening sequence and “the German song (called “Waltz”)” that plays in the “München beer hall”; the hibakusha girl (an unnamed character in the sub plot whose story is implied to be the film Okuyama tells his wife about) who is “sexually accosted by an old soldier in the psychiatric hospital” and Okuyama’s later attempted rape of a woman on the street; The surrealist doctor’s office which counters Okuyama’s “Tokyo-moderne mélange” style apartment; “the proliferating sea of faces under the film’s credits” which is seen once again in “the Magritte-like mass of featureless people that suddenly spills out onto the street” (Quandt). In the
opening sequence, the anonymous mass move, as if in unison, to Toru Takemitsu’s waltz, eerily resembling a single pulsating body.

The *hibakusha* girl (referred to as “girl with scar”) appears in the sub-plot of the film. In the novel, it is explicitly stated that her story is, in fact, the movie Okuyama goes to see (titled *One Kind of Love*), yet the film only suggests this with an abrupt switch to “letterboxed widescreen” when her story first begins “before reverting [back] to full frame” (Quandt). The right side of the girl’s face displays a large keloid scar, implied to be from the Atomic bombing of Nagasaki (her hometown). She works at a psychiatric hospital for repatriated soldiers, many of whom appear to be haunted by the war; in one scene, a soldier yells “air raid” while another is seen crouching on the ground in a fit of terror. Sakaki notes the way the soldiers are temporally fractured by the collective memory of the war: “Memory, which is often said to be formative of identity, has lost coherence in these soldiers’ minds, the reverse of the problem that the man with the face of another has: in order for him not to be identified with the himself of the past, he has to fake amnesia” (384). The girl is also shown to be worried about an encroaching war and this fear culminates in the final scene when she drowns herself on a seaside vacation with her brother (after engaging in an incestuous affair) and a flash of light appears on screen, a visual signifier of the white light of the Atomic bomb.

The new identity that emerges from Okuyama’s mask comes from wearing the face of another, yet the extent to which the face asserts itself and Okuyama plays the part behind the mask he is wearing is inscrutable; the border between them inextricably blurred. When Okuyama attempts to masquerade as another man to seduce his wife, he is angered to discover that she knew it was him all along. Rather than “seek ‘truth’
behind the face of another... she embraces the truth that emerges across the 'veil'... the face of another remains as translucent to her as the 'veil' should be" (Sakaki 382).

Okuyama, however, cannot accept this reading of the face and in a fit of fury, attempts to rape another woman. He is saved from arrest by Dr. Hira who tells the officer that Okuyama is an escaped patient.

In the penultimate scene of the film, Okuyama and Dr. Hira stand opposed, mirror image reflections of one another (for the two are always juxtaposed as doppelgängers), while a faceless crowd ebbs and flows around them (wearing opaque masks that conceals all expression). Dr. Hira implores Okuyama to give him back the mask and Okuyama declines. The doctor ominously states that “some masks come off, some don't” (1:59:33- 1:59:35), implying that the act of wearing a mask can become permanent when the identity of the other supplants the identity of the self. Then, seeming as if to go for an embrace, Okuyama stabs Dr. Hira who staggers to his death. When the camera pans to Okuyama’s face there is a white light visible in the corner of the screen (a doubling that recalls the death of the girl). In the final shot of the film, Okuyama reaches slowly for his face, pinching at the surface of the mask, which now appears to have the depth and tenacity of real skin. Is the face “alive!” à la classic horror where the creation frighteningly (re)asserts itself or has Okuyama “affixed” himself so deeply to the mask that it is now indistinguishable from his own skin? In *Eyes Without a Face* Christiane is ostensibly “free” from her father, yet her is face is still concealed behind the opaque mask.

Each of the works display the aporia of the post-injury (post-surgical, post-trauma) face/body and the somatic nostalgia that burgeons in its aftermath, attempting
to supplant the corporeal reality in favour of (illusively) returning the body a former state; one obliterated and contained in the (imaginary) past.

**CONCLUSION**

The subjects in this thesis all express various facets related to abjection: the alienation and isolation of separation, the violence of excision, the loneliness and sadness, the articulation of the body-in-pain, the pulsating wound that always bears witness. Many of the subjects in this thesis grapple with a sense of locating the self, of attempting to construct a sense of identity from this fragmentation, often internalizing the abjection and regarding themselves as strange or foreign. The aporia of abjection — a process that renders something neither object nor subject, alive nor dead — is reminiscent of the ghost. The ghost, like the abject, is threatening since it cannot be neatly pinned down; it evokes uncanniness and threatens the subject because it exists outside of meaning. As I have explored through this thesis, abjection is a tale of ghostification; the abject separated from the body is circumscribed to an ontological space that is “ghostly”: seemingly invisible, a presence that reveals an absence. To consider the abject as “the ghostly subject” is to acknowledge the ontological erosion that emerges in the wake of abjection and the fragmentation that ensues.

In his essay “on cultural anesthesia: From Desert Storm to Rodney King” Allen Feldman describes cultural anesthesia as the “insight that in a post-Holocaust and late capitalist modernity, the quantitative and qualitative dissemination of objectification increases the social capacity to inflict pain upon the Other…to render the Other’s pain inadmissible to public discourse and culture” (406). He notes the “derealizing” nature of
the camera which renders abject bodies on screen as “nonspecific” (fungible, to use Saidiya Hartman’s word); erasing the specificity of what’s on screen further embodies and specifies the audience — as seen in *The House is Black* whose mission is to “alleviate pain” yet presents its subjects as mute backdrops for Farrokhzad’s political poesis. The notion of “cultural anaesthesia” is particularly pertinent in reference to the subjects of this thesis and it prompts me to consider some necessary parting questions: Who is speaking for the abject? Does it work to render the abject grotesque, frightening, a thing of horror? Attempt to embody and is that embodiment a form of hostage, appropriation — like Takemoto’s re-imaging in *Imag(in)ed Malady*? Does it further abject the abject? Further ghostify the ghost?


Žižek, Slavoj. “From Urvater to Holocaust...And Back.” *Parallax*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2000, pp. 28–35.