

**Paradoxical Bodies:
Femininity, subjectivity and the visual
discourse of ecstasy**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to explore the possibility of the articulation of an embodied feminine subjectivity within visual culture. Tracing the tropes and discourses of visibility operating around the female body in representation via Warburg's notion of the *pathos formula*, I examine the extent to which specific images acquiesce or resist dominant narratives of femininity within patriarchal visibility.

The search for an embodied subjectivity leads to encounters with paradoxical bodies whose apparent passivity and ecstatic submission mask potential articulations of subjecthood through networks of visual and bodily memory. When the female body is represented in extreme states, where it can be both subject and object, desiring and desired, it becomes engaged in discourses of concealment and revelation, veiling and penetration, interiority and exteriority, which are played out in terms of drapery, skin and the body's boundaries. These visual articulations of femininity are at the heart of Western visual culture, traversing the boundaries of context, period and genre, yet bodily representation often remains problematically linked to phallic and fetishistic modes of viewing which perpetuate the alienation of a feminine subjectivity.

Beginning with *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa* by Bernini, the first chapter presents the impasse met by traditional art history and begins to propose, around the figure of Mary Magdalene, the notion of the 'Caravaggesque' body. The second chapter traces the phallic structure of viewing through representations of Venus and sculptural drapery, finishing by interrogating the engagements of Cindy Sherman and Orlan within these discourses. Chapter Three articulates potential areas within visual culture, from Caravaggio to Artemisia Gentileschi to Hildegard of Bingen, where depicted subjectivity begins to emerge beyond a dualist structure of the body and mind. Finally, a theorisation of the visibility of pregnancy leads to the possibility in Chapter Four of a feminist articulation of subjectivity based on a body marked by a pre- and post-maternal temporality.

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All translations are mine except where otherwise indicated. I will follow the convention of spelling 'Mary Magdalene' but will not amend citations which specifically use the form 'Magdalen'.

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Introduction

Visual art representing religious ecstasy attempts to do what textual representations, even written by those who experienced it, fail to do – express and convey the experience of indescribable spiritual rapture.

The potential of visual art to represent the unrepresentable is enabled by the paradoxical simultaneity of meaning which is to be found underlying certain postures of the female body, postures which are critically engaged with by visual works traversing several centuries of Western art.

My thesis is characterised by these two founding statements: firstly, that what I have called the ‘visual discourse of ecstasy’, since attempting the representation of the unrepresentable, must fundamentally challenge and transgress the nature of visual representation; secondly, that it is through the visibility of the female body that the first premise is engaged, and that this is a phenomenon which operates outside of the restrictions of a given critically defined period or medium of the visual arts.

The original notions which generated this thesis project arose during my undergraduate studies, where I discovered the iconography of the *Noli me Tangere* scene in Renaissance art, and the subtlety of the interplay of touch, desire, sexuality, bodily subjectivity and Christian spirituality. I was fascinated in particular by the sense of the multivalence, emotional weight and power encapsulated within the apparently simple gestural language of the Magdalene reaching for the resurrected Christ.

In the survey of the literature discussing the imagery of religious ecstasy which constitutes the first part of Chapter One of this thesis, the paradox of simultaneous contradictory meaning which first struck me, connected to the figure of Mary Magdalene, several years previously, is rehearsed and traced centred around the ecstatic figures sculpted by Gianlorenzo Bernini. In these initial stages it becomes clear that some of the traditional modes of practising history of art are also being challenged by some of the very images which constituted its most canonical archive.

By drawing on the codes and visual terminology which have become associated, for many viewers today, with a patriarchal construction of female sexuality as passive, visual representations of ecstasy have become one of the taboos of art history – occupying a terrain suspended between the erotic and the sacred which academic studies of such artworks, desiring to categorise them as one or the other, have been unable to adequately

engage with. Often denounced by feminists as a male fantasy of female pleasure, and seen as disempowering, the potential of many such representations to allow a unique language for the unrepresentable and for the depiction of subjectivity has been overlooked.

From an initial focus on the iconography of the ‘tossed-back head’ and the imagery of ecstasy, over the course of the research the scope widens to focus on the representation of the female body undergoing intense or extreme states. These embodied experiences constitute an archive of visual forms, the potential meanings and associations of which are particularly strongly inscribed and dictated by the visual and sexual politics of the surrounding culture. The incarnations of these forms, traversing the history of art like Warburg’s definitive *pathos formula*, the *Nympha*, therefore also carry and communicate traces of these transformations and passions across time. The continuity of these tropes, traversing the boundaries of context, period and genre, draws attention to the underlying themes of patriarchy and visibility which are continually perpetuated and repeated within culture.

This reciprocal dialogue, in which the representation of the female body is both subject and object of culture, is mirrored by the status of the art object in history. On the one hand subject to and reflecting the visual influences of its historical context, it is also part of a network of visibility, containing images from both before and after its creation, which inform and shape the specific moment of viewing by a specific viewer. The representation of the female body in extreme states, where it can be both subject and object, desiring and desired – and a representation which travels, transposes and metamorphoses across different cultures and contexts – transgresses traditional modes of interaction with an art object, and in some cases is able to undermine a viewing position which would possess or control it.

As such, the female body in representation becomes engaged in discourses of concealment and revelation, veiling and penetration, which are played out in certain works by a manipulation of the physicality of an artistic medium such as painting or sculpture. In these works, an awareness of the medium is crafted through the interplay of surfaces and folds, light and shadow, and the exaggeration, manipulation and transgression of layers of skin or cloth, in order to draw attention to the paradox of what is represented: a bodily physicality, used to express spirituality. While some works may simply reinforce harmful cultural stereotypes of femininity, others are able to problematise and subvert the assumed passivity.

In the discussion of the concept of 'mirror', Chapter One opens up a space for discussion where subjectivity is located specifically within an apparently passive figure, and concepts of knowledge, truth, reality, as well as the roles of viewer and subject, and the operation of the gaze, are destabilised and reassessed. In Chapter Two a study of responses to the seminal figure of the female body since the antique, the *Knidian Venus*, establishes the vocabulary of the insidiously misogynistic discourse of sexuality and power which is at work in the art and art history surrounding the female body in representation. Concepts of temporality and inside-out in Chapter Two, intellectual tension and bodily metaphors of fire and flame in Chapter Three, and discourses of maternity and memory in Chapter Four, are examined in turn, tested against a wide variety of visual sources, and gradually drawn together.

In essence, the task of the thesis is to trace ways in which the negative associations of the female body in visual culture – notably in the forms of fetishistic desire and in the annihilation of the body through its enforced passivity – could be undermined from within; to identify ways in which subjectivity and identity has found representation while neither reinforcing nor disregarding the dominant visual codes. Instead, those codes shall be seen to already contain rich and varied forms of transgression which enable an embodied subjectivity in the feminine.

Chapter One

I would see beside me, on my left hand, an angel in bodily form... his face so aflame that he appeared to be one of the highest types of angel who seem to be all afire. ...In his hands I saw a long golden spear and at the end of the iron tip I seemed to see a point of fire. With this he seemed to pierce my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails. When he drew it out, I thought he was drawing them out with it and he left me completely afire with a great love for God. The pain was so sharp that it made me utter several moans; and so excessive was the sweetness caused me by this intense pain that one can never wish to lose it, nor will one's soul be content with anything less than God. It is not bodily pain, but spiritual, though the body has a share in it – indeed, a great share.¹



Fig. 1 : Gianlorenzo Bernini, 'Ecstasy of St. Teresa', c. 1645-52, Cornaro Chapel, Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome

In the church of Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome, there is an extract of Saint Teresa of Avila's *Life* provided in each of the major world languages lying on the parapet which separates the viewer from the sculpture by Gianlorenzo Bernini, *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa*, in the Cornaro Chapel (Fig. 1). The text physically intervenes between the viewer and the sculpture even as the chapel's architecture stages Teresa's (and Bernini's) marble performance of her mystical union with God. The sculpture ostensibly 'illustrates' the text, since the text is chronologically earlier, and an extract from writings dictated by St. Teresa of Avila herself. The viewer is apparently being asked to accept the text's authority to explain the sculptural group. Distanced as it necessarily is, however, from the woman who experienced the vision, the text can only be an approximation of representation, an attempt to describe powerful sensations and emotions.² In the chapel, however, the text plays the role of caption: used to illustrate the sculpture and to both prepare and accompany the viewing of it.

Bernini's sculpture in the church of Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome (Fig. 1), is one of the works of art in the Western world most profoundly caught up in the debate between word and image, intention and representation. It undermines assumptions about art, sexuality, spirituality, femininity, subjectivity, revealing agendas and assumptions; and it undermines art history itself in its endless unresolved encounters with images and texts through the centuries.

In a chapter devoted to the concept of 'framing', Mieke Bal describes her role in the presentation of an exhibition of 17th century Dutch painting.³ She explains her unorthodox use of captions:

...Captions, within museum practice, function like keys or shifters between visual and textual information... they are the sites of the learning that is meant to turn the viewer into an admirer and emulator of the curator-as-scholar. ...it seemed to me that they had to be de-naturalized. The decision to furnish some but not all of the works in the show with captions was in itself an important part of my endeavour to de-frame by providing multiple frames ...I was reluctant to emphasize obvious meanings, loath to underestimate viewers, or to turn the show into a book.⁴

Bal's resistance to the traditional museum format enables a multiplicity of possibilities to unfold in the exhibition room, between the way paintings and the other cultural objects presented interact with each other, and the presence of both the curator and viewer as desiring and motivated subjects in this interaction. While these are mere anecdotes from Bal's wider work on the relationship between text and image, it reveals how this relationship is above all seen as profoundly active and conscious. She elsewhere

positions a caption in order that it ‘might invite the viewers to consider’ a perhaps unexpected interpretation of the juxtaposition of two paintings in the exhibition.⁵ The caption, therefore, rather than describing or contextualising an isolated piece, in Bal’s exhibition both draws attention to the invisible curator as an audacious and personal commentator (making suggestions, subjective remarks, creating connections and suppositions) and steps back from an authoritative role of informing, instead deliberately sowing uncertainty by bringing the subjectivity of the curator to the foreground.

The positioning of the text in the Cornaro Chapel, while outside of the context of a museum ‘show’, sets in play some similar issues. Neither straightforwardly describing the sculpture nor positioning itself as the conscious intervention of a subjective curator, the presence of the text, nevertheless, problematises the space of the chapel. While no ‘curator’ as such can play a role in what is a working chapel and place of Christian worship, the decision to have the text intervene in this way, results in the space being ‘de-naturalised’ and multiple frames put in play. The interaction between the text and the sculpture opens up the space of representation and destabilises the status of the visual object. Neither one of them illustrates the other – both attempt to represent something unrepresentable. The very incongruity of the interaction reveals the insufficiency of both, and draws attention to this lack, in the face of what they struggle against each other to portray.

The intention to represent the unrepresentable

Almost all of the great Catholic mystics express, in some form or another, the fact that the experience of mystical ecstasy is indescribable; they are unable to put it into words. Maria Maddalena de’ Pazzi, a sixteenth century Florentine Carmelite, quotes St. Paul, ‘[even] if I had the tongues of angels I would not be able to tell you...’.⁶ Madame Guyon, a late seventeenth century French mystic, writes of one of her mystical experiences that it was ‘too simple, pure and naked for me to be able to speak of it. The most elevated dispositions are those of which one can say nothing.’⁷ Angela of Foligno, a thirteenth century Italian Franciscan, writes that ‘divine operations went on in my soul which were so ineffable that neither angel nor saint could relate or explain them.’⁸ And in the *Interior Castle*, Teresa of Avila writes that ‘these visions, and many other things impossible to describe, are revealed by some wonderful intuition that I cannot explain,’ and ‘On returning to itself, the mind can recall what has been seen, but is unable to describe it.’⁹

The attempt to describe what is indescribable, in fact, characterises the nature of the writings of the mystics. These texts, of course, do describe, and at length, the indescribable nature of what has happened. It is an irony of which, here related to painting, the French cultural historian Louis Marin was deeply aware when he refers to an antique legend;

Pliny says in his *Natural History* that Apelles enjoyed painting things that cannot be painted, such as lightning, thunder, and storms: the impossible subject of painting through which the act of painting is nevertheless consummated. Apelles painting the unpaintable is not only the myth of the painter or the paradigm of his perfected science, but also the myth of painting...¹⁰



Fig. 2: Nicolas Poussin, 'Stormy Landscape with Pyramus and Thisbe,' 1651, Städelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt

Marin cites a letter in which the French seventeenth century painter Nicolas Poussin defined his specific intention when painting the 'Stormy Landscape with Pyramus and Thisbe' of 1651 (Fig. 2);

In a word: "I have tried to represent the unrepresentable, the sublimity of a tempest on earth." I have tried...: the intention of painting *that*, the invention of this subject of a painting, the position, in this intention and this invention, of the painter-subject, myself, Poussin, necessarily, ineluctably failing in something, since this subject cannot be painted, and that is perhaps why he writes, why he (de)scribes. ...the act of painting (*le 'peindre'*) is realized there through its very failure.¹¹

The paradox of the intention to represent the unrepresentable, becomes for Marin, the intention to fail in this endeavour, failure being inevitable: therefore, the artist is engaging with the nature of visual art itself, and self-consciously undermining and redefining its whole reason for existence.

Marin is gradually crystallising here a debate also engaged in *To Destroy Painting*.¹² In this book, Marin investigated Poussin's statement about Caravaggio, that he 'could not bear Caravaggio and said that he had come into the world in order to destroy painting'.¹³ In an astute review of the book, Norman Bryson summarises Marin's perception that this seventeenth century moment of interaction between these two artists indicated a fundamental shift in the nature of art itself.

Both artists, Marin argues, are centrally concerned with mapping the system of painting itself; concerned, that is, not just with making an image but with making the image reveal, inside itself, the nature of the system that produced it... Poussin sketched and planned every move in advance, but contemporaries recorded that Caravaggio dispensed with preparatory sketches, painting directly on canvas what was before his eyes. This difference in technical approach was a symptom of something deeper, Caravaggio's desire to tear down the edifice of all the instituted rules of decorum and erudition whose sum, for Poussin, equalled painting itself.¹⁴

Marin makes this encounter self-reflexive about the nature of painting and art itself. In fact, with very different agendas, both artists were sowing the seeds of a revolution which was to be realised two hundred years later in the aftermath of Impressionism. It is a move which continues in *Sublime Poussin* where Marin draws attention to the newfound self-consciousness of artistic practice, where at this most 'Baroque' of moments, the connections between intention, representation and meaning were permanently destabilised.

One does not represent a tempest on earth, at best one imitates, to the best of one's ability, the effects of its incommensurable forces... The effects? No – but the unique effect of all the many forces in manifestations dispersed here and there, the singular effect in which all that disorganized diversity of forces is concentrated and compressed.¹⁵

Marin's dense prose well conveys the paradox which he sees figurative art as having encountered at this moment in art history, in his evocation of organised chaos which comes across powerfully in Poussin's image of the effect of wind: Poussin's specific gift being the impression of grace, poise and a pure, architectural form of pictorial balance, the furore of the storm being concentrated into a core of pure, balanced force. Marin argues that a 'Baroque' moment in the seventeenth century undermined traditional assumptions

that it was possible to identify what a given piece of visual art was 'about'. This is a typical analysis made, in fact, of modernist painting: Clement Greenberg wrote that it

may be characterized in terms of the gradual withdrawal of painting from the task of representing reality – or of reality from the power of painting to represent it – in favor of an increasing preoccupation with problems intrinsic to painting itself.¹⁶

Many theorists aside from Marin, however, also identify the seventeenth century in terms of cultural self-reflexivity. In *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault identified the Baroque as a period characterised by the split between words and things; 'The age of resemblance is drawing to a close. It is leaving nothing behind it but games.'¹⁷ Art in the seventeenth century became 'conscious', and played games, in the way in which its own materiality could manipulate its viewers. Marin applies to the seventeenth century an argument of Michael Fried's, referring to modernism:

that all paintings, particularly representational ones, are implicitly if not explicitly self-critical. That is, in a pictorial manner, they raise the fundamental problems inherent in painting or in painterly representation itself. To say that representational paintings use pictorial means to raise the fundamental problems of painting is to claim that they represent or make evident representation itself, the very process by which they are produced.¹⁸

Fried drew attention to the failure, when dealing with this kind of painting, of

the kind of art criticism that essentially aims at an understanding of the topics and themes of a painting, of its propositional content, the goal being to grasp the ever more complex codes that allow these themes to be identified and recognized by viewers.¹⁹

In relation to art which explicitly attempts to represent the unrepresentable, such as representations of religious ecstasy, these approaches fail. In their attempts to reconstruct 'evidence', usually textual, such interpretation is often based on the artist's original intention. When such intention in fact has become, in Poussin's own ironically loaded words or in Foucault's term, a 'game', an ironic and self-referential play on the nature of visual art will divert and refute any attempt to discover what exactly is represented.

The desire to know

Louis Marin writes of the desire of the analyst or commentator:

What the painting leaves to be desired and the pleasure the painting offers, are replaced by... the desire to know the enigma that opens up the space of desire only to withhold all gratification; the desire to decipher the secret, to identify the letters (or letter) that constitute(s) the formula providing access to the painting; the desire

finally to make explicit the discourse whose origin this formula conceals, the longing to transform the pleasure of painting or its *jouissance* into a pleasure or *jouissance* of language.²⁰

Later he adds, ‘If I can not decipher it, I would like at least to spell out the letters of the enigma governing the painting in question’.²¹

Marin identifies a form of *jouissance* in the profound desire to know the secret of a painting, to know how it creates that desire to know itself, even when that knowledge is not forthcoming. He defines that *jouissance* as sited in language, even specifically down to the ‘letters’ which paradoxically are described as providing the key to a visual image. The visual artwork is seen as disguising and concealing a ‘truth’ which the written word will reveal. The analyst’s desire for knowledge is thus based within language and the desire to literally convert an image to written language, and thereby to know it. Visual knowledge is distrusted; texts have ‘authority’.



Fig. 3: Gianlorenzo Bernini, ‘Ludovica Albertoni’, 1671-74, Altieri Chapel, San Francesco a Ripa, Rome

We have seen how an extract from St. Teresa’s *Life* formed a paradoxical caption for Bernini’s sculpture (Fig. 1): art representing the unrepresentable unsettles, and provokes an even deeper desire on the part of art historians to possess and convey a representable meaning through language. This leads, in practical terms, to an urgent need on the part of traditional art history to explain the ‘meaning’ of art with recourse to textual evidence. In the case of depictions of bodies in extreme states of intense emotion, or alternatively in apparent abandon, the aftermath of passion or grief, the urgency is to identify ‘what is

being depicted', 'what is happening', 'what they are experiencing'. At the outset of her study of Bernini's other famous sculpture of ecstatic rapture, the *Blessed Ludovica Albertoni* (Fig. 3), Karen Perlove states her intentions explicitly: '[To propose] an interpretation of the precise nature of the experience that Ludovica is undergoing... [and to explore] the significance of the event in the light of contemporary theological thought.'²² Nigel Llewellyn comments:

How sensible was it for the author to embark upon such a project? We might start by reminding ourselves that what she must mean by such a phrase is something like 'the precise nature of the experience that *Bernini shows Ludovica* as undergoing'. The statue is an artificial contrivance, a construction which cannot be considered in terms of truthfulness, however closely it may appear to follow a narrative.²³

The tireless drive to *explain* what was happening to the woman depicted in the sculpture is the body of Perlove's thesis. Perlove is searching for the grand narrative which will pin down the sculpture once and for all: she feels compelled to ask questions which may have seemed quite logical in traditional art history: what is happening in this sculpture? Why was it commissioned in this particular form? What do the different aspects symbolise? What did Bernini *intend* when he chose this particular posture for the saint? The sculpture refuses to answer, leaving Perlove lost in a sea of inconclusive possibilities – the *Ludovica* has pushed art history to its limit.



Fig. 4 – see ref. Fig. 3

In 1505, Condivi (Michelangelo's biographer) tells us that Michelangelo was designing figures for his great commission, the tomb of Pope Julius II, to go around the base of the tomb in front of the pilasters, and that the figures were intended to represent the Liberal Arts. These figures were to be bound, because if the Pope had died, the Liberal Arts would also be prisoners of death without his patronage. After the Pope's death, however (and in the light of the continued richness of artistic patronage which ensued) this identification seems rather irrelevant. Would Michelangelo have necessarily followed rigidly the original iconography under such circumstances? Art historians found they could no longer comfortably trust this contemporary textual evidence.

John Pope-Hennessy summarises the different interpretations of these sculptures, the so-called *Dying Slave* and *Rebellious Slave* now in the Louvre (Fig. 5 and Fig. 6):

Many people would, of course, deny that these statues represent the Liberal Arts at all. In 1898 Ollendorf dismissed the explanation as *lächerlich* [laughable], and declared that instead they must portray the human soul on earth as though in prison. More recently they have been thought to represent 'the human soul enslaved by matter'.²⁴

This interpretation is relevant to a large body of Michelangelo's work, inspired in part by his method of working the marble, which he conceived as the gradual emergence of the figure from the block of stone in which it had been trapped.²⁵ But there is a compulsion to ask what exactly is happening in these sculptures. Whereas the *Rebellious Slave* (Fig. 6), could be more clearly seen as trying to free his hands from where they may be tied behind his body, seen in the tautness of the muscles in his shoulders and the twisting struggle of his body, and the fact that he seems active and thinking rather than passive, the *Dying Slave* (Fig. 5), seems to be much more loaded with ambiguity. This Slave could be interpreted as struggling free of his bonds or merely struggling in them, dying, waking, in the throes of pain or of sexual pleasure, or merely sensually exhibiting his slenderly muscular body. Pope-Hennessy feels 'bound' to come to a definitive analysis which nails down the 'meaning' once and for all:

We, moreover, like the Slaves, are bound – not by fetters but by evidence. There is no evidence at all that the Slaves represent the soul, but there is evidence that they represent the Liberal Arts, for on one there appears a roughly carved ape, and on the other there is a lump which might be a second embryonic ape. The likelihood, therefore, is that the two figures depict 'art the ape of nature', and that the Dying and Rebellious Slaves are symbols respectively of the arts of painting and sculpture. Even if that is granted, what they are doing is not altogether clear. The Dying Slave is said ... to portray 'the moment of death' but it could equally portray the moment of awakening.²⁶

Pope-Hennessy concludes from this that the likely subject of the sculptures is therefore 'the resurgence of the Visual Arts', but does not venture further into the problem neither does he reflect further on the nature or causes of this ambiguity of interpretation. One notable omission is that there is no discussion of the sensuality or sexual power of the sculptures. Many questions raised by the work, including the nature of their hypnotic attraction, and their widespread renown and fascination, remain both unspoken and unanswered.

The desire to find one unifying meaning, to 'pin down' a disturbing work of art, results in this kind of analysis. In this extract Pope-Hennessy reaches the point of where he is forced to admit 'We just don't know'.

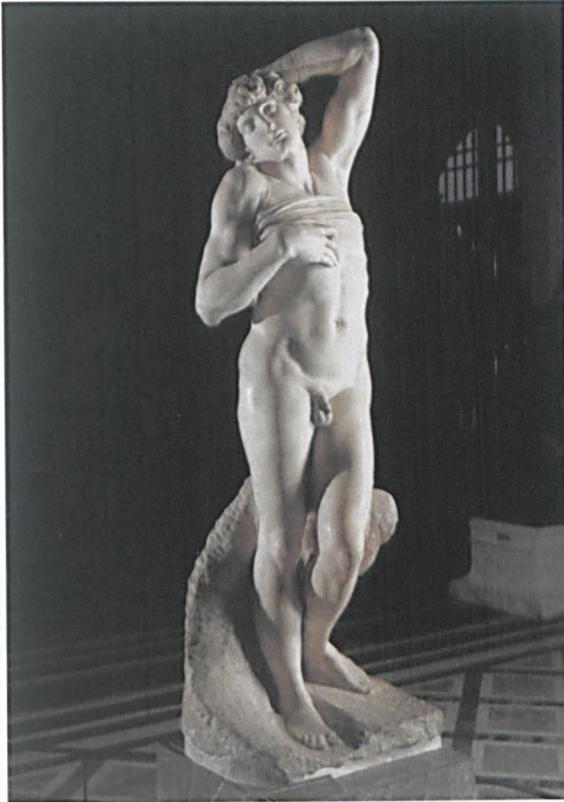


Fig. 5: Michelangelo Buonarroti, 'Slave (dying)', c. 1513, Musée du Louvre, Paris

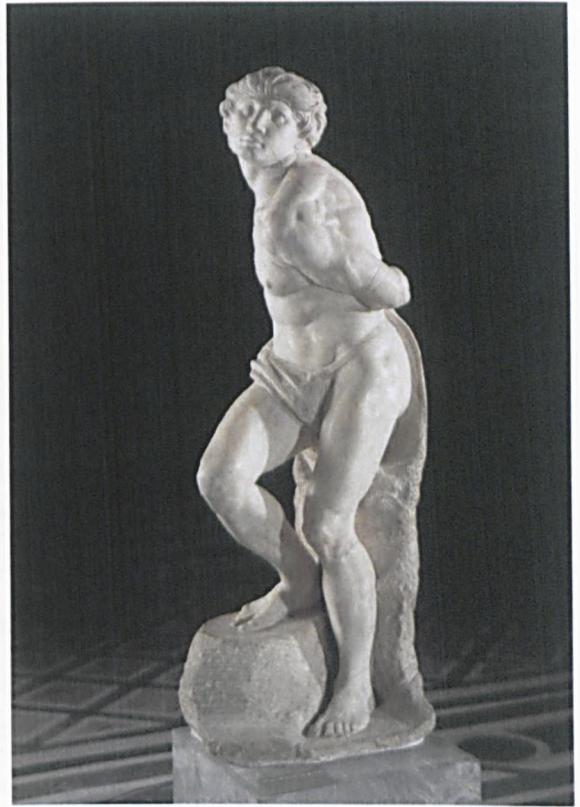


Fig. 6: Michelangelo Buonarroti, 'Slave (rebelling)', c. 1513, Musée du Louvre, Paris

Nigel Llewellyn makes a similar analysis of Karen Shelley Perlove's thesis on Bernini's *Blessed Ludovica Albertoni* (Fig. 3). Perlove bases her thesis on extremely complex theological questions. Following a notion which has become an art historical commonplace, which for Llewellyn was 'mistakenly' taken from Panofsky, Perlove justifies such complexity by suggesting that Bernini and his patron had a humanist 'adviser' who directed the creation of the work according to developed theological concepts. Llewellyn summarises the results of Perlove's iconographical investigation:

Perlove's commentary on the meaning of the statue of Ludovica Albertoni is presented like an elaborate gloss on a theological tract. The book simply heaps layers of interpretative possibility one upon the other until the reader loses all sense of direction. The *Blessed Ludovica Albertoni* preserves the physical evidence of her cult; she is a saintly analogue to Carlo Borromeo; she personifies the Roman state; she is a present for Cardinal Altieri (she is also his present to Trastevere); she has the features of St. Anne; she is a tomb and an altar; she is Charity; the BVM [Blessed Virgin Mary] and... an expression of Bernini's own spirituality. Perlove gives herself the task of unravelling this 'complex iconographical scheme whose layers of meaning... convey a unified conception of the *beata*'. Ludovica is one; Perlove takes her apart and reassembles her; it is magic.²⁷

Giovanni Careri's analysis of Perlove's book corroborates Llewellyn's as he remarks that theology cannot be merely applied to art as if it were an iconographical dictionary. He accuses Perlove of accumulating so many external elements of interpretation that the resulting analysis is rather rough and general, as opposed to getting to grips with the 'internal dynamic'.

Careri goes on to highlight some more examples of this in his analysis of the interpretation of the *Ludovica* by Frank Sommer.²⁸ Sommer's article suggests a reading of the sculpture based on a series of engravings in the 1624 Jesuit text, *Pia Desideria*, written by Hermann Hugo and illustrated by Boethius a Bolswert. The text, which was a very popular devotional work, included an engraving emblem (Fig. 7), illustrating the 'incendium amoris' or the fire of love, a burning sensation experienced during ecstasy which was reported in mystic writings. Sommer begins his article by quoting Aldous Huxley's response to Bernini's statue in *Themes and Variations* in 1934: 'the spectator feels a shock of embarrassment... one has the impression of having opened a bedroom door at the most inopportune of moments.'²⁹



Fig. 7: Boethius a Bolswert, 'Incendium Amoris', 1624, Pia Desideria

Sommer makes no comment about the text he has quoted except for the single line, 'Thus far the novelist.'³⁰ In this rather barbed and sarcastic summary disposal of Huxley's non-scholarly status and opinions, Sommer expresses all he feels about the uneducated, 'unseemly' response. Sommer adds, 'she has not 'gone to bed' (so far as I know, no one, even in the seventeenth-century, 'went to bed' fully clothed and wearing shoes).'³¹

Sommer's rejection, specifically, of Aldous Huxley's comments on the sculpture, is based on technicalities of historical evidence such as this. On a more serious note, Careri criticises Sommer's identification of the emblem of the 'incendium amoris' with Bernini's sculpture: '[An emblem cannot] translate, with nothing left over and in a stable language, that which is defined precisely by its instability and singularity.'³²

In Sommer's attempt to discredit Huxley's interpretation, he reaches into theology to explain a work which has too many different aspects to conform to only one interpretation. Careri agrees that Sommer's interpretation forms one part of the puzzle (there are depictions of flaming hearts concealed around the sculpture, as if to give

iconographical ‘clues’), but he concludes that ‘...the studied ambiguity of Ludovica’s posture still makes the viewer ask himself unsettling questions’.³³

Knowing *Teresa*

To define the nature of Careri’s ‘viewer’ is a difficult task. *The Italian Connection*, an internet travel company, aims only to prepare an average twenty-first century American tourist for a thrill;

The mystical experience melts with a real passion, to the limit of eroticism. Visitors may be shocked or thrilled by the physical nature of Saint Teresa’s ecstasy (shown above), as she appears collapsed on a cloud with mouth half open and eyelids closed, struck by the arrow of a smiling angel.³⁴

Travel and Leisure.com, another internet travel company, says it all in the sentence ‘Bernini’s St. Teresa in Ecstasy will make you blush’.³⁵

Indeed, ‘bedroom’ interpretations of images of ecstatic saints, outside of the specific discipline of art history, have abounded at least since the eighteenth century, ranging in tone from the sensual to the lascivious. In the words of Shân Short, a male ‘voyeuristic economy’ in relation to Bernini’s work is particularly in evidence in the nineteenth century.³⁶ Short cites the novel *Rome*, where Zola writes breathlessly:

...in particular see [Bernini’s] statue of St. Teresa in Ecstasy at Santa Maria della Vittoria! Ah! That Santa Teresa! It is like heaven opening, with the quiver that only a purely divine enjoyment can set in a woman’s flesh, the rapture of faith carried to the point of spasm, the creature losing breath and dying of pleasure in the arms of the divinity!³⁷

In 1872 Hippolyte Taine writes similarly in *Italy, Rome and Naples*:

We returned to Santa Maria della Vittoria to see the St. Teresa of Bernini. She is adorable. In a swoon of ecstatic happiness lies the saint, with pendant hands, naked feet and half-closed eyes, fallen in transports of blissful love. Her features are emaciated but how noble!... even to the folds of the drapery, even to the languor of her drooping hands, even to the sigh that dies on her half-closed lips, nothing is there in or about this form that does not express the voluptuous ardour and divine enthusiasm of transport. Words cannot render the sentiment of this affecting rapturous attitude. Fallen back in a swoon her whole being dissolves; the moment has come, and she gasps, this is her last sigh, the emotion is too powerful...³⁸

And the same formula is found in Stendhal:

St. Teresa is represented in an ecstasy of divine love; here is the most ardent and the most natural expression... What divine art! What voluptuousness!³⁹

By these comments, Teresa is claimed by her effusive observers, who ‘already know’ her ecstasy and can ‘explain’ Bernini’s representation of her. Stendhal in particular continues to make explicit his claim on the complete understanding of both the statue and the saint,

Our good monk believing that we did not understand it, explained this group to us: ‘e un gran peccato’ he finished... saying ‘that these statues can easily present the idea of a profane love’ ...Bernini has known how to translate in this statue the most passionate writings of the young Spanish woman.⁴⁰

The comment of the early nineteenth-century monk who guides Stendhal’s party is a revealing insight into the embarrassment which the statue could potentially cause for the Church at the time, at any rate for a ‘tourist’ audience (here of French intellectuals on the ‘Grand Tour’), sufficient to make the monk apologise and hastily explain the theological basis of the work. Stendhal denies that he has in any way misinterpreted the sculpture which he describes as ‘voluptuous’. Not only does he claim knowledge for himself and his party, but also for Bernini, portrayed as complicit in the knowledge of Teresa.

Jean-Noël Vuarnet’s *Extases Féminines* also claims knowledge of Teresa. The book is a frankly sensual, objectifying and personal enjoyment of its female ecstatic subjects – he describes the work as a ‘memorial of enigmatic femininity’.⁴¹ Vuarnet is unequivocal in his acceptance of the erotic qualities of the saints’ writings and in their representations. His introduction to his chapter on St. Teresa focuses on the viewer and reader’s response to the disturbing ambiguity of the different Teresas with which we are presented, from the sacred to the erotic:

When we talk about Teresa of Avila, we never really know which Teresa we are talking about: the one who lived in Avila, the one who represented her own ecstasies in extraordinary romanesque meditations, or the one who so many artists, from Bernini to Klossowski, represented. This equivocality, which, more than common sense allows, makes her equivocal for us, of course makes us love her - of course, not with a very pure or a very honest love, but at least with that love of which we are capable.⁴²

Vuarnet revels in Teresa’s ambiguity and reproduces it himself in the very ambiguous ‘love’ he admits to holding for Teresa, revelling in the voyeur’s position. It is her equivocality, specifically, which makes him love her. He loves a woman who is unknown, who no longer has a fixed identity (‘we never really know which Teresa we are talking about’) because there are so many incarnations of her, from the ‘real’ woman from Avila onwards. Vuarnet does not mourn the loss of a ‘real’ Teresa or try to reconstruct her. Instead he embraces and claims the right to freely desire and distort this non-reality.

When discussing Bernini's sculpture of the saint (Fig. 8), Vuarnet places it in the same category as others of his works, ones which are more conventionally recognised to treat 'erotic' subjects, such as the *Rape of Proserpina* (Fig. 10) or the *Daphne and Apollo* (Fig. 9), in the shape of a Baroque 'spectacle' to be visually enjoyed. Vuarnet colludes with a Bernini whom he sets up as complicit in a deeply problematic construction of the sexual woman as exhibitionist; pleasure or abuse represented indiscriminately; 'For Bernini, criminally, knows what women in love, raped, or kidnapped, are exhibiting: a spectacle. It is this spectacle which, as a typical voyeur, we enjoy after him.'⁴³



Fig. 8: see Fig. 1



Fig. 9: Gianlorenzo Bernini, 'Apollo and Daphne', 1622-5, Galleria Borghese, Rome



Fig. 10: Gianlorenzo Bernini, 'Rape of Proserpina', 1621-22, Galleria Borghese, Rome

Later in the book, he goes even further in his explicit admission of the parallel which Barasch also makes. It raises no question, however, as for him, in language which deserves further analysis, he declares that 'there is no doubt':

There is nothing more beautiful than the feminine face in orgasm, nothing more ambiguous. Looking at one is enough, even in a painting or a photograph. The resemblance is striking, there is no doubt: all resemble... Angela, Catherine or Teresa...⁴⁴

Vuarnet's terms are very close to those of Jacques Lacan, perhaps the most famous as well as the most crude response to Bernini's *Teresa*; 'You only have to go and look at Bernini's statue in Rome to understand immediately that she's coming [qu'elle jouit], there is no doubt about it.'⁴⁵

Lacan uses Bernini's *Teresa* in his seminar 'Encore' as a visual illustration of his theory about female sexuality that women's pleasure is excess, unknowable and unsayable

even by the woman herself. His writing on Teresa is bound up with questions of knowledge. He writes, 'There is a *jouissance* proper to her and of which she herself may know nothing, except that she experiences it - that much she does know. She knows it of course when it happens.'⁴⁶ Lacan declares ignorance of the exact nature of this *jouissance* and expresses a strong desire to understand it, to force its secrets to reveal themselves: '...ever since we've been begging them - ...begging them on our knees to try to tell us about it, well, not a word! We have never managed to get anything out of them.'⁴⁷

In his unexpected jump into art history, Lacan implies that it is only through a representation created by a man (Bernini) that we can have any kind of account of the 'supplementary' *jouissance* he posits. His treatment of the art object is problematic, equating Hadewijch d'Anvers' writings with the sculpture of St. Teresa: 'As regards the Hadewijch in question, it is the same as for St. Teresa.'⁴⁸ Despite the fact that the texts of the mystics are, Lacan says, 'the best thing you can read', it is finally only through the interpretative powers of two men, first Bernini and then himself, that the specifically feminine experience can ultimately be described; 'They [women] don't know what they are saying, which is all the difference between them and me.'⁴⁹

Lacan claims to understand the *Teresa* by identifying 'immediately' the experience being depicted in the sculpture. Of a sincerity which is provocatively ambivalent, Lacan's comments highlight the discourses of knowledge, power and possession surrounding the interpretation of the sculpture, and the extent to which Bernini's representation has become entangled in sexual and visual politics.

Deliberate mistakes – Bernini's intention

Careri points out the fact that '...most art historians feel obliged to remind us that Bernini was extremely pious.'⁵⁰ Simon Schama agrees that 'scholars have fallen over themselves to warn us that what we are looking at could not possibly be a moment of sensual surrender' and Harry Polkinhorn refers to the denial of any eroticism as 'the party interpretation'.⁵¹ Throughout the discipline of art history, we find the secular accusations, desires and fantasies from throughout the centuries consistently refuted. Art historians agree either that there is no sensuality whatsoever depicted, or that where some sensuality cannot be denied, it is resolutely orthodox and would have been perfectly proper in Bernini's time.

Michael Call, writing about the *Teresa*, goes one step further by a specific attempt to prove that Bernini himself, instructed as to the possible impropriety of the subject matter, particularly manipulated every aspect of the sculpture group and chapel with this same aim, of avoiding any possible erotic associations in the *Teresa*'s reception, according to the strict requirements of the Counter-Reformation Church. Call attributes to Bernini complete artistic control in terms of intention; an intention which has deliberately created networks of distance and thwarted gaze between the viewer and the sculpture of St. Teresa – for a theological purpose.

Throughout the article, however, Call undermines his own argument by maintaining the partial failure of this intention: terms such as 'attempted', 'warned against', 'expected to', '*nearly* erased' abound. He concludes paradoxically,

Bernini, like all artists, must have been aware that inherent in the very nature of artistic production is the surrender of the artefact to the viewer. The extraordinary measures taken by Bernini to shape the viewer's interpretive experience are in a very real way an acknowledgement of the ultimate independence of the reading or viewing act, a truly vexing reality for those who wish to draw upon art's power to serve an ideological agenda. Teresa's story can - and in fact does - wrest itself free from an institutionally correct reading, *in spite of all that Bernini has done...* With each new generation of viewers - male or female, believer or nonbeliever, Western or non-Western - comes a different set of interpretive networks into which the 'meaning' of Teresa is integrated. (My emphasis.)⁵²

Call concludes,

No box, however beautiful or skilfully wrought, can eliminate all the possible variations on that meaning. Teresa's story may yet be used to serve a wide variety of ideological purposes, but Teresa herself, we can be sure, will continue to resist boxing.⁵³

Call's art historical agenda in this extract, the attribution and identification of monolithic control by the artist within a very specific historical and cultural context, is struggling against what this network of images within the chapel is actually doing in the present. The scholar takes recourse to the ultimate failure of the artist's intention, in order to explain away what is in fact the failure of this form of art history. In addition, the chapel, and the sculpture itself, end up by being attributed agency and personality, and become interlaced with the personality and character of the historical woman Teresa, with whose experiences the sculpture must be a critical engagement, not an equivalence.

The anxiousness throughout Call's essay is explicitly a result of the concern about a possible ambiguity of interpretation of the *Teresa*. Bernini's overarching efforts of control are, for Call, due to the nature of St. Teresa as a dangerous subject due to the risk of

'suspicion of sexual immorality' in the experience of religious ecstasy as it was commonly perceived (Teresa herself had been interrogated for possible heresy). Call writes that 'Bernini's charge... was to prevent that from happening.'⁵⁴ Call's theory of absolute control amounts to,

Teresa then, her sexuality nearly erased, floats 15 feet above the chapel floor, passive, controlled, and safely ensconced in a massive strongbox.⁵⁵

Call leaves his article open as to the ways in which Bernini's intention may have failed to keep *Teresa* pure and orthodox, although Emile Mâle writing in 1932 located a specific 'mistake' in the very strangeness of composition and manipulation of viewpoint which, for Call, were precisely the opposite: the artist's attempt to keep the viewer at an appropriate distance from the representation of the female ecstatic body. Mâle writes,

...one cannot see Bernini's sculpture properly, despite all the precautions he took to show it off to its best advantage. Placed quite high and far away from the spectator, we cannot see the real facial expressions, which photography has revealed to us.⁵⁶



Fig. 11 – Detail, see ref. Fig. 1



Fig. 12 – Detail, see ref. Fig. 1

For Mâle, a photograph represented a purer, more *truthful* version of Bernini's *St. Teresa* than seeing the work itself in the Cornaro Chapel. A discontinuous, disturbing effect must be 'unintentional'. Mâle considers his own text, as well as the photographs he provides, to be accurate and truthful *representations* of what the *St. Teresa* 'really is like' or what it 'really means', to the extent that Bernini is described as having made a 'mistake'. Mâle continues,

Since the so very spiritual President De Brosse,⁵⁷ it is all the rage to talk about this group from Santa Maria della Vittoria with a smile. These insinuations would have astonished Bernini's contemporaries and Bernini himself first of all, because the artist wanted with all his heart to glorify her who was purity itself, and who never knew what the troubles of 'instinct' could be. (She never had to struggle against temptation, and according to the canonisation bull, when her nuns came to tell her about their own temptations, she sent them to their confessor, because of her own ignorance.)⁵⁸ The mistake comes in part from the fact that one cannot see Bernini's sculpture properly; despite all the precautions he took to show it off to its best advantage. Placed quite high and far away from the spectator, we cannot see the real facial expressions, which photography has revealed to us. Contrary to what is often said, the angel's smile is not malicious; instead, it exudes a youthful goodness touched with sadness, as he knows that with the heavenly joy he is bringing, he brings also suffering. As far as the saint is concerned, there is a gravity on her sad features, on her almost closed eyes, on her half-open mouth, which is the gravity of death. Her expression is that of another saint sculpted by Bernini, the Blessed Ludovica Albertoni, which he represented dying in the transports of heavenly love. Faithful interpreter of saint Teresa, here Bernini expressed the frailty of nature succumbing to the divine blow.⁵⁹



Fig. 13 – Detail, see ref. Fig. 1



Fig. 14: Gianlorenzo Bernini, preparatory drawing for the head of St. Teresa

Mâle's tone is contemptuous as he slates the 'fashionable' erotic interpretation of the sculpture. In fact, he never makes explicit exactly what 'these insinuations' may be. He merely describes this interpretation as 'l'erreur', the mistake. Mâle blames Bernini for mismanaging the placement of the sculptural group in the chapel (in a work which is elsewhere lauded as a perfect example of a 'bel composto', a perfect union and staging of

different artistic disciplines.) Mâle cites the bull of canonisation of St. Teresa which, according to the norm for female saints, established her perfect purity of body and mind, and complete freedom from any impure thoughts. Again the real Teresa of Avila is being conflated with a sculptural engagement with one of her experiences. Bernini is described as the ‘faithful interpreter’ of Teresa herself.

Mâle continues to outline what ‘should’ be the ‘correct’ interpretation of the sculpture (defensively turning to a construction of a Bernini who would have been ‘astonished’ at the misunderstanding of his art). He advises the unexpected approach that, because of the unfortunate



Fig. 15 – Detail of angel, see Fig. 1

placing of the work, one should see a photographic representation of it rather than the work itself, to understand what the artist really intended. (In fact, a preparatory drawing by Bernini (Fig. 14), proves that he conceived of the face of the saint as being seen from below.) According to Mâle, with the help of the photograph we can then see that the angel’s smile *is not* strangely malicious; the expression of the saint *is* the gravity of death. For Mâle, there is only one ‘true’ understanding of the work.⁶⁰

In fact, by accusing Bernini of positioning the work badly, Mâle implies that it is not possible to interpret the image correctly from the normal standpoint below the sculptural group. Somehow Mâle’s criticism implies that *every* first interpretation of the work (which is not based on photographic close-ups) is in danger of inclining towards the erotic.

The concerns of this classical art historian from the 1930s are maintained up to the present day in traditional art historical texts, where any interpretation drawing attention to a possible ‘eroticism’ is often described as wrong. Writing in 1999, we find Mâle’s countryman Pierre Cabanne commenting on the *St. Teresa* as follows:

This sculpted group illustrates saint Teresa pierced by the angel with the arrow of divine love, with a sensuality which is even more provocative in the light of the contemporary recommendations of saint Ignatius to experience faith with all the senses and with all the imagination. But the numerous commentators who have reported the 'eroticism' of the saint's attitude *are wrong*, as the bull of canonisation reports the vision which Teresa was granted, and all confusion between human love and divine love can only distort the meaning of this work, which, according to the Church, is divested of all ambiguity. (My emphasis.)⁶¹

Caterina Napoleone's article celebrating the restoration of the Cornaro Chapel is another example of a similar unwillingness to engage with 'unseemly' interpretations of Bernini's sculpture. She writes:

...the mystic Ecstasy of St. Teresa ended by inspiring equivocal and indeed unseemly interpretations, particularly in modern writings... Not only were all the doubts concerning Teresa's sanctity now rehearsed, but also Bernini's religious feeling itself, which had never been conceived as a sincere one. This misconception was further endorsed by the presence of the beautiful angel, as ironic and provocative as a pagan Cupid... Reclining softly on a cloud, her assumption cannot but be heavenward, whatever chattering tongues may say.⁶²

Napoleone's 'chattering tongues' echo Mâle's 'smile' just as her avoidance of making explicit just what those 'unseemly interpretations' are, echoes Mâle's own. Like Mâle she rejects as 'misconception' anything but the 'chaste' interpretation, and like Cabanne she does not allow the co-existence of human and divine love; it is simply impossible for Bernini, as a Catholic, to infuse his sculpture with erotic power.

Explaining the image: Steinberg, Careri and Barasch

The denial of sexual or erotic interpretations of images dealing with Christian subject matter usually follows the line that whatever the image may look like, it is simply impossible that a canonised saint could be having any form of erotic or sexual experience in relation to God. The overriding authority given to the written word is Leo Steinberg's at times very personal battle in *The Sexuality of Christ*, his coinage 'textism' good-naturedly complaining about art history's 'oblivion' to its own subject, the paintings and sculptures which constitute the discipline's archive. He remarks that '...texts obscure, quite as often as they illuminate, Renaissance pictures':

Textism as I define it is an interdictory stance, hostile to any interpretation that seems to come out of nowhere *because it comes out of pictures*, as if pictures alone did not constitute a respectable provenance. ...To my mind, the deference to far-fetched texts in mistrust of pictures is one of art history's inhibiting follies. It surely

contributed to the... Cloud of Unseeing that caused Christ's sexual nature as depicted in Renaissance art to be overlooked.⁶³

'Textism' is in fact the primary reason Steinberg offers for the widely negative response to *The Sexuality of Christ* among, specifically, art historians. He blames this reaction simply on a failure to look. Steinberg's evidence is, primarily, visual: 'That the infant Christ, for whatever reason, may want to publicize his genitals is a notion exclusive to the image as primary source'.⁶⁴ Arguing that a visual emphasis on Christ's genitals in Renaissance art (particularly at critical moments in babyhood and after death) symbolises the reinforcement of the belief in Christ's full and



Fig. 16: Giovanni Bellini, 'Madonna and Child', c.1460-64, Accademia Carrara, Bergamo

complete humanity, the second revised and enlarged edition includes more than three hundred illustrations to support his case, and cites many more. To give just one example from the concluding section where the author replies to his critics, Steinberg criticises the classic position of art history, such as that held by Charles Hope, that the task of the discipline is 'to understand what the art of the Renaissance meant to people at the time by reading what they said about paintings and about their faith'.⁶⁵ In essence, the aim of classic art history would be to reconstruct, using textual evidence, what people of the time saw in images. For Steinberg, such a position denigrates visual evidence. Steinberg's argument is, however, very securely grounded in theology and does not, indeed, in any sense depart from a historical perspective.⁶⁶ Indeed he goes to great length to illustrate Renaissance belief, theology and culture as apt for the kind of 'ostentatio genitalium' which he proposes occurred within art. All bases are covered, since Steinberg is aware that he is intervening in what remains one of the classic debates of art history. The sexuality of Christ aside – and it has been one of the greatest taboos of the discipline – the lines between what is visually apparent and what is subsequently constructed, and about the possible anachronism of a modern viewpoint attributing inappropriate interpretations to Renaissance images, are debates passionately engaged in across art history.

Where ecstatic saints are concerned, similar stakes are raised, and several scholars

do make very careful analyses, starting from the image and what it appears to show. Neither attempting to deny nor affirm a sexual interpretation, they rather attempt, as does Steinberg with images of Christ, to understand and explain what appear to be references to sexuality in the context of contemporary thought and culture. Giovanni Careri's contribution to our understanding of Bernini's *Ludovica* (Fig. 3) is outspoken about the impact of the sculpture on the viewer:...

the viewer wonders what is happening inside Ludovica's convulsed body: is she suffering or climaxing?...⁶⁷

...most art historians feel obliged to remind us that Bernini was extremely pious and that his saints and blessed ones were great mystics, rather than extremely sensual women. Today, the manifest sensuality of the sculpture seems, for certain people, to contrast with the holiness of the place in which she is displayed...⁶⁸



Fig. 17: Maerten van Heemskerck, 'Man of Sorrows', c. 1550, Bob Jones University Collection, Greenville, SC

Careri's explanation of the sexual connotations of the *Ludovica* hinges on the strange combined effect of tension and relaxation which the sculpture produces. *Ludovica's* head is relaxed, but her chest seems to be in a tense spasm, perhaps of pain. Careri's explanation follows the Song of Songs when he defines ecstasy as the union of the spiritual body of the saint with the spiritual body of Christ. St. Teresa, in her much quoted description of the piercing of her heart by the angel (the scene depicted in Bernini's sculpture (Fig. 1), and which was quoted in her bull of canonisation by Pope Gregory XV), refers to the combination of pleasure and pain experienced, and the ambiguous relation between the spiritual and physical body. Careri is suggesting that the sensations of agony of the physical body in the throes of death is combined in the *Ludovica* with the sensual abandon of the spiritual body, an interpretation which is conscious of St. Teresa's understanding of the Song of Songs as the words of love between the Lord and his Bride.

In an essay analysing the gesture of the 'tossed-back head', Moshe Barasch draws attention to the similarity between the face and head positions of Bernini's *St. Teresa* (Fig. 1) or *Ludovica Albertoni* (Fig. 3) and a work usually recognised as sensual, in this case Correggio's *Io* (Fig. 19). Rather than immediately making 'safe' the expression of the saint

by distancing it from the erotic connotations it holds, Barasch, like Careri, probes that very similarity:

In terms of conventional iconography one can hardly think of a more striking contrast: a creature of pagan mythology versus a late medieval saint; a nude, lusty female against a fully garbed, spiritualized nun; the rapture of sexual union versus the mystical experience of divine vision. And yet, in comparing the two heads, their remarkable resemblance cannot be disregarded; in both we see the same posture, and a very similar expression of climactic experience combined with complete passivity - the manifestation of an altogether internal experience. One cannot help asking: how could such distinct, contrasting figures be cast in the same mould?⁶⁹



Fig. 18 – see ref. Fig. 1



Fig. 19: Antonio Correggio, 'Io', c. 1530, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

Immediately and candidly identifying the crux of the problem, Barasch argues that images using the motif of the tossed-back head, despite 'differences in nuance', have an 'underlying compositional pattern' which is similar.⁷⁰ All use the motif to express a moment of extreme emotional 'pitch' or intensity, ranging from 'Dionysiac frenzy' to pain, terror, despair, 'sensual rapture', divine vision, or death. He says that this motif is an

Urwort, or ‘source word’, an idiom in the language of gestures which can carry many meanings. Barasch continues by investigating the specific circumstances of seventeenth century theological belief which could have permitted this apparently ‘blasphemous use of the erotic climax as an image of *unio mystica*’.⁷¹ He cites the contemporary philosophy of ‘Negative Theology’, such as that expressed in Cusanus’ *Docta Ignorantia* (‘Learned Ignorance’) to illustrate the Renaissance interest in theological paradoxes such as those which form a main theme of St. John of the Cross’s *Dark Night of the Soul*. Barasch suggests that it was this theological idea of paradox which fostered a type of representation of religious ecstasy which consciously referred to its moral opposite, sexual lust.⁷² His ‘explanation’, like Careri’s, is well-argued and persuasive.

Its own story: the limits of iconography, and the subjective analyst

The work of scholars such as Steinberg, Careri and Barasch is vital in the demystification of the tabooed subject matter of sexuality and sensuality within Christian art, and provide sound, academic and skilled discussions of the visual evidence. There remain, however, questions unanswered by these methods. While they all explain how such apparently problematic representations could be possible and perfectly orthodox in the contemporary theological and cultural context, what they do not enter into is the phenomenon of what happens in the process of viewing – what the image is doing in culture. Images here are still conceived as passive, troublesome conundrums that, once explained, are solved. Careri himself provides an articulation approaching the problem;

Instead of wondering how a work represents a gospel story, a mystery or a spiritual process, we limit ourselves to recognising the story or the shape as if it was a question of an exhaustive translation of a story or shape already present.⁷³

Mieke Bal makes a similar caveat. Referring to the apocryphal Biblical story of *Tobias*, she notes: ‘Signs like...the little dog... do not tell the story; they refer to a story.’⁷⁴ Bal wishes to draw attention to the fact that iconography, as traditionally-understood, relies on specific clues or cues being identified, which produces the *recognition* of a story. Such recognition provides assumptions and ready-prepared answers to questions the image may have previously posed – Perlove’s problem is that there are too many of these possible answers because there are too many conflicting clues referring to too many stories: a situation which fits Bal’s proposal well. Bal writes,

I am not proposing that we ignore the evoked story in favour of some ‘fresh’ or ‘direct’ visual narrative. Rather, I would like to make a case for a double, differential reading, which juxtaposes the evoked against the narrated story, in order to let them interact and to let the tensions between the stories produce new meanings... Iconographic reading tends to obliterate the other story because stories are sometimes so generally known that readers/viewers have difficulty realising to what extent the visual work responding to the story signifies its own story.⁷⁵

J. Cheryl Exum also emphasises the ultimately limiting aspects of text and knowledge based interpretation.

As Mieke Bal demonstrates so forcefully in Reading ‘Rembrandt’, this kind of competence, while offering a powerful interpretive tool, also exercises a powerful control over interpretation. By providing a program of how to analyze a work of art, it encourages us to interpret within established parameters and thus can prevent us from noticing details that don’t fit and from exploring alternative interpretations.⁷⁶

For Steinberg, these issues are part of a general problem about a hierarchy operating between text and image. He criticises misuse of images where the image is made to fit an argument already established largely through textual sources. He writes,

As, in traditional theological folly, woman compounds a lower corporeal nature – so that female to male is as the body is to the spirit – so the abstracted spirituality of the word outranks the materiality of the image. The latter’s carnality is too coarse to avail against worded knowledge.⁷⁷

Although the argument of ‘textism’ is simplistic, and does not do justice to the wider debate about the relationship between textual and visual evidence, and different types of narrative and iconography, Steinberg’s argument about the physical compellingness of the visual image, and the political networks within which visibility functions, is supported by his masterly ekphrasis – throughout his work can be found accomplished and moving textual evocations of the viewing moment and process.⁷⁸ His personal combination of word and image throughout his writings, which frequently deal with such polemical issues in art history, is persuasive and powerful. However, in *Closet Devotions*, Richard Rambuss criticises the work of both Steinberg and Caroline Walker Bynum (whom he nevertheless thanks for reinstating the ‘body’ in the centre of the study of religious devotion):

I am especially troubled by the ways in which the pioneering and still prevailing scholarship on devotion has too readily circumscribed both the libidinal and the transgressive potentialities of the sacred body, whether it be the body of Jesus or a saint or an individual Christian devotee.⁷⁹

Rambuss accuses Steinberg’s *The Sexuality of Christ* of reducing its subject to a ‘hermeneutically delimiting theologism’:

Steinberg carefully hedges with reference to *dogma only* the field of available meanings of and responses to representations of Jesus' arrestingly exposed body - as though, for instance, Michelangelo's nude, impressively muscled *Risen Christ* would then (or now) stimulate reflection, as Steinberg implies, only upon the doctrine of the Resurrection.⁸⁰

Rambuss's stated project, then, is to consider 'sacred eroticism' *as* eroticism; to investigate 'the heterodoxies of gender and eroticism that can be embraced and inhabited through the mechanisms of devotion',⁸¹ and he cites the quasi-erotic spiritual writings of the metaphysical poets, and in particular their homo-erotic content, as a rich source of discussion. He states that he wishes to investigate, out of sexuality and religion 'which is the origin of the other...neither to reduce religion into sex nor to desexualize devotion.'⁸²

In short, he wants sex to be read as sex and not to be made to fit yet another 'meaning'. Rambuss' spanner in the works, his attempt to undermine these binary constructions at work between body and spirituality, begins to operate across the literature. Rambuss points out that despite the value of such scholarship in providing justifications and explanations, ultimately they fail to deal with the life of the image in a bodily sense, including in the present - to discuss the process of viewing itself, as carnal. The body cannot be fully reinstated in discourse about art until viewing is recognised as a bodily process, and the viewer and the analyst are recognised as desiring subjects.

Griselda Pollock explored the desire of the analyst in *Differencing the Canon*, a book written explicitly from the perspective of acknowledged and lived subjectivity on the part of the analyst of the art under discussion.

The book aims to allow difference to help us reread the canon in new, expanded, contentious but engaged ways. I say of Van Gogh that I could not see what I suggest is his ambivalence toward the maternal body in his drawing of a peasant woman without also recognizing a comparable psychic possibility within myself.⁸³

Pollock also demonstrates how meaning is dependent on the desire of the viewer.

Such paintings are a space in which possibly contrary meanings could vie with each other. While none is excluded, some may be preferred, according to the perspective of the reader or viewer, and whether or not they are reading within a dominant or subordinate cultural formation. At this level, the picture does not 'express'. It is a productive site for several possible meanings.⁸⁴

Moving away, therefore, from what an image may or may not 'express' or 'encode', we encounter tension between the 'identification' of what is the orthodox story, and the multiple other meanings which the image enables.

This tension is manifest in what is for many the most immediately striking aspect of the *Teresa* sculpture group (Fig. 1), the disturbing or arousing aspect which *exceeds* the space of the chapel as well as the time of the 17th century; the origin of the discomfort experienced by some recent art historians. Unable to adhere to the absolute affirmations of purity and chastity of some of their colleagues, unwilling to descend into prurient adulation, and despite providing complex solutions to explain profound ambiguities and paradoxes, many are left disturbed and unsettled by the experience of viewing the sculpture, and specifically by the multiplicity of associations awoken. Jonathan Jones writes, 'it's the sudden, embarrassing intimacy that makes Bernini's most famous sculpture, *The Ecstasy of St Teresa*, so disturbing... and the reason [it] still induces a shudder – the reason it is not just funny – is that it is also about death.'⁸⁵ Simon Schama writes, 'I was sitting in one of the pews opposite, unsettled as usual by what I was seeing.'⁸⁶ This discomfort has been articulated, right up to the present day, by scholars who have attempted to come to terms with the actual effect the sculpture group exerts on the viewer.

Disturbing elements

Like Michael Call, Harry Polkinhorn considers that Bernini deliberately manipulates the viewer's response to the chapel. He acknowledges the odd, disturbing elements which perturb particularly (as Mâle noticed) a modern photographic, totalising relationship to art.

The central sculpture, for example, is made up of not one but two figures, a first decentring. Second, this group is located in a conceived setting which Bernini achieved in part by having the church wall built out so as to create a small, claustrophobic area; 'the Cornaro Chapel expresses the idea of confinement in its extremest form.'⁸⁷ The viewer is forced to look up at the central group and cannot see the entire arrangement at one time. In fact, in a crowning irony the Chapel 'cannot be photographed in its entirety,'⁸⁸ effectively cutting off our frequently photographically mediated illusion of a totality. (The drive to totalise, however, is so strong that engravings have been produced showing all the Chapel's features; such images are regularly reproduced to accompany discussions of the Chapel.)⁸⁹

The claustrophobic chapel, which for Polkinhorn was unambiguously Bernini's intention, forces an encounter with the sculpture, which then refuses to be encountered by *exceeding* the edges of the photographic frame with which a viewer attempts to contain it.



Fig. 20: view of chapel recess – see ref. Fig. 1



Fig. 21: view of chapel recess – see ref. Fig. 1

Acknowledging that most of the contemporary attitudes towards the sculpture group did follow the ‘official’ interpretation, Polkinhorn comments that,

Those negative reactions which were entered (‘theatricality, sham piety, sentimentalism, sexual hyperbole, and vulgar taste’) Peterson [sic] writes off to viewers’ failure to take into account the chapel setting. He fails, however, to examine the forces into which this setting casts the viewer.⁹⁰

Polkinhorn finally connects the disturbing visuality of the chapel itself, inaccessible through photography, to a proto-modernist destabilising of representation.

Was Bernini figuring forth an intuition of the radical unnameability of things, poised on the brink of the abyss of the modern in which all names have been stripped away, the process one of a free-floating, even hysterical delirium exactly parallel to Teresa’s? ...[Bernini] may have been able more keenly to project the dizzying changes which were soon to affect the nascent bourgeoisie’s final turning away from feudal/aristocratic social forms. The artist, like a jiu jitsu master, uses our own habitual response patterns against us, causing us to tumble into those emptinesses in his work which correspond with the emptiness within us whose correspondence in the social dimension, *mutatis mutandis*, is the vanishing of subjectivity under classical industrial capitalism.⁹¹

Polkinhorn proposes an analysis of the connection between the psyche and effect upon subjectivity of the social structure, and of the artist’s role in drawing the viewer into the signifying emptiness of the threat posed by ‘the modern’. It is clear that for Polkinhorn,

the effect produced by the sculpture group is perceived as a simultaneous insight into, and threat to, the structure of subjectivity and visuality as they function within societal structures.

The carnality of marble

The study to which Polkinhorn refers, Robert Petersson's *The Art of Ecstasy*, makes an inter-disciplinary comparative analysis of St. Teresa's writings, Bernini's Cornaro Chapel, and Richard Crashaw's sixteenth century poetic tribute to Teresa. His theologically careful commentary approaches the *Teresa* frankly:

Of the erotic quality so often commented on, fleeting signs are visible in the hands and feet, in the contours of the mouth, chin and brow, and in the posing of the body beneath the robes. Unquestionably the figure of Teresa is erotic, but in no exclusively physical sense. The facial expression is full of passion yet its spiritual content distinguishes it very readily from, for instance, the pure earthly passion showing in the face of Costanza Buonarelli. Teresa seems to be breathing, her mouth warm, moist, and a little opened as if releasing the silent moan mentioned in the *Vida*... Without the overwhelming spiritual motive, Teresa would indeed be the woman William James saw as carrying on 'an endless amatory flirtation' with God.⁹²

Petersson seems to contradict himself as he denies that the erotic quality of the Teresa is physical, while at the same time strongly reinforcing the physicality of the sculpture through a detailed ekphrasis; he describes her mouth as warm and moist – clearly the sculpture itself is in fact cold and dry marble, but the power of Bernini's sculptural language seduces many viewers into reading real human qualities into the representation. Petersson chooses to read the *Teresa* alongside the remarkable sculpted portrait of Costanza Bonarelli, the wife of one of Bernini's assistants with whom he had had a passionate affair (Fig. 22).

For Petersson it is the very face of the *Teresa* sculpture whose '...spiritual content distinguishes it readily...' from the 'earthly passion' in the *Costanza* (Fig. 22). A master of facial expression, Bernini conveys intensity largely in terms of the gaze and its possession.⁹³ Whereas *Costanza's* eyes gaze confidently, challengingly and passionately, *Teresa's* pupils are hidden behind a half-lidded 'absent gaze'; she has just thrown her head back, possessing the moment where passion is at its height much as the surging, forward force of the *Costanza* possesses and claims her desire and that of the



Fig. 22: Bernini, 'Bust of Costanza Bonarelli', c. 1635, Musco Nazionale del Bargello, Florence



Fig. 23 – Detail of St. Teresa's face, see Fig. 1

viewer. Both women have been interpreted as in the midst of vocal expression: Petersson and others describe *Teresa's* 'silent moan', and Simon Schama asserts the *Costanza* bust to be exceptional in terms of portraits of women, due to the fact of what he sees as a portrayed act of speech: 'A virtue of the sex was supposed to be their quietness, but Costanza is shown in the act of speech, enormous eyes not lowered but wide open, blazing.'⁹⁴

A comparison of the two faces, rather like a viewing of Mâle's supposedly revelatory photographs, raises more questions than it answers. Simon Schama, importing this time Bernini's biographical history at the service of 'meaning', links the two in precisely the opposite way from Petersson. In this reading it is precisely Bernini's sexual experience, in particular with Costanza Bonarelli, which informs his rendering of *Teresa*; 'the intensity of Theresa's ecstasy, the representation of the transport of the soul, in fact, had everything to do with carnal knowledge, especially Bernini's own.'⁹⁵

It is an art historical debate, continuing to this day, which has become increasingly untenable in its black and white construction of meaning. Not all scholars, however, feel the need to reproduce the same debate ad infinitum, and some exploit the very tensions which the debate has exposed.

Mary Magdalene, one of the most iconic and controversial figures of the New Testament, is situated at the heart of the ambivalent visual identity between the sexual and the sacred which these discussions of *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa* (Fig. 1) have brought to light. A saint characterised more by ‘myth and metaphor’ than by historical fact, she has been represented not in one consistent guise but rather by multiple avatars in visual art and popular culture across the centuries.⁹⁶ To move now to the visuality of the Magdalene, through the tensions and paradoxes brought out throughout the history of her representation, the scene is set for wider debates about the nature of the body, femininity, subjectivity and visuality which will arise in subsequent chapters.

Mirror and concept

Mieke Bal exploits, enjoys, and actively encourages the tension produced in images where a narrative or identificatory impetus to *recognition* is juxtaposed against a striking and provocative visual ambiguity.

The narrative imported does not preclude other readings, visual storytelling and the reading thereof are able to produce competing narratives that stand in tension with the doxic story. I shall argue for that tension – for its existence and for its productivity. I shall argue that both the iconographic and the visual-narrative modes of reading need to be acknowledged, exploited, and maintained concurrently. But, rather than advocating a dialectic solution, I shall argue for maintaining the tension, a tension that is unresolvable, dynamic, that makes possible a reading attitude wherein recognition is the primary, but never a stable nor reliable, tool.⁹⁷

Bal comments, with relation to the iconography of the mirror in Western art, that all ‘meanings’ which have been assigned to the image of a mirror over time (she already enumerates 25 possibilities) are cultural constructs: ‘Iconography can only propose more or less plausible choices among these possible meanings. What it cannot explain is the mirror’s multivalence and the way such choices are encouraged if not imposed.’⁹⁸ In other words, Bal’s argument liberates the writing of art history so that it is no longer necessary to be merely concerned with an identification of meaning, but of the ways in which meaning operates.

To take Bal’s suggested multivalent sign of the mirror further, an extended case study of the figure of Mary Magdalene in relation to the mirror, explored as an independent concept, can demonstrate the connections between meaning, visuality and identity.⁹⁹ The concept of the ‘mirror’ uses the literal mirror as a trope which, while anchored in visuality

and itself creating networks of gaze, subject and object, is also at the heart of culture through psychoanalysis, metaphor, symbolism, and tradition. I use the term 'concept' in the sense understood by Mieke Bal, who argues, 'Concepts... offer miniature theories, and in that guise, help in the analysis of objects, situations, states, and other theories':

The shift in methodology I am arguing for here is founded on a particular relationship between subject and object, one that is not predicated on a vertical and binary opposition between the two. Instead, the model for this relationship is interaction, as in 'interactivity'... Concepts are not fixed. They travel – between disciplines, between individual scholars, between historical periods, and between geographically dispersed academic communities. Between disciplines, their meaning, reach, and operational value differ. These processes of differing need to be assessed before, during, and after each 'trip'.¹⁰⁰

Taking the mirror as a concept in this sense helps to activate and set up encounters between some striking visual interpretations of the figure of Mary Magdalene. Emerging the other side of its travels, I hope to show that the concept of the mirror can also open up avenues of exploration for the rest of this extended study.

Mary Magdalene and 'truth'

The scene in the Gospel of John (20:16) where Mary Magdalene recognises the resurrected Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane is one of the most poignant, and vividly visually rendered, in the New Testament. An aspect of this scene is represented in a sixteenth-century painting by Giovanni Savoldo, one version of which hangs in the National Gallery, London (Fig. 24). In the painting, the saint, her bowed head, body and arm veiled behind a brightly reflective silver cloak, turns towards the viewer and gazes directly out of the picture frame. In front of the empty tomb, she is turning, about to see the risen Christ. The Magdalene's gaze is at once frank and mysterious, calm and intense; the remarkable cloak fills the rest of the composition.

One of the most common characterisations of the Magdalene, despite no such mention appearing in the Gospels, is that of the repentant prostitute.¹⁰¹ Erotic interpretations of Savoldo's painting across the centuries naturally drew inspiration from the potential for fantasised sensuality in this identification. Descriptions ranged from the 'young, warm and impulsive woman', to 'a romantically veiled beauty' to straightforward readings of the painting as a courtesan portrait.¹⁰² It was not until the intervention of Mary

Pardo that the haunting figure and her extraordinary reflective cloak received deeper consideration.



Fig. 24: Giovanni Girolamo Savoldo, 'Mary Magdalene', c. 1535-40, National Gallery, London

Pardo presents Savoldo's *Magdalene* as a masterpiece of painterly artifice, intended to showcase the talent of the artist for creating ironic *invenzione*, artistic sleight-of-hand. She reveals how the light reflecting in the saint's extraordinary garment is the reflection of the risen Christ, whom Mary Magdalene turns to meet on Easter morning in the Garden of Gethsemane. Although the Magdalene could be posited in some contexts as being

privileged to see and speak bodily with Jesus, here, for Pardo, the *Magdalene* is nothing more than a device, a screen upon which to project the artist's inventiveness;

.. it does not pretend to 'contain' truth, only to reflect it; its ostensible content is wholly exterior to it. Yet the resultant 'emptiness' is also a kind of limitless potentiality (since it holds the viewer in thrall) and guarantees the painter's essential autonomy in spinning out his fiction.¹⁰³

The figure of the Magdalene herself, for Pardo, is a cipher – a 'code' – enabling the artist to endow his composition with meanings ranging from the theological to the iconographic.

While recognising the importance of Pardo's work on this painting, I wish to take issue with the view of the Magdalene as an empty mediator, void of independent 'truth'. In investigating the notion of 'Magdalene as mirror' via a case study of Savoldo's *Magdalene* but also a *Magdalene* by Caravaggio, I argue that, on the contrary, rather than being a 'passive...projection screen' a certain kind of early seventeenth-century *Magdalene* actively appropriates the mirror.¹⁰⁴ Somewhere in the play of body and light, paint and canvas, the painted body becomes the agent, the instigator of the interaction between self and other. It is therefore a 'knowing' Magdalene assuming both erotic bodiliness and sacredness who engages and challenges the viewer's gaze: the Magdalene of the Gnostic gospels, the knower of 'truth' who said to the disciples, 'What is hidden from you, I will proclaim to you.'¹⁰⁵

Mary Magdalene above all other saints transgressed the visual boundary between sensuality and spirituality; and not only in the limited sense of the depictions of her semi-naked penitence, in her guise as the repentant prostitute. In the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, long before popular legend attributed a historical significance to their relationship, the privilege of the Magdalene's role was her sensual relationship with Jesus.¹⁰⁶ Carmen Robertson, referring to the iconography of the 'Noli me Tangere' scene from the Gospel of John, notes that,

...the scene shifts from a wholly didactic and religious intent in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries to an emphasis upon the physical relationship between Christ and the Magdalene in the sixteenth century. Little in the sacred scripture suggests the sexual interpretations that become commonplace in portrayals of the pair in fifteenth and sixteenth-century Italy.¹⁰⁷

Robertson's suggested sixteenth-century turning point is corroborated by the wealth of *Lamentations* or *Pietàs* from the period where the Magdalene's touch is usually more dramatic or imbued with desperate passion than that of the Virgin, or where she even

replaces the Virgin as the primary site of interaction with Jesus' body.¹⁰⁸ The Magdalene enables the figuration of a dark sexuality which is, nevertheless, firmly contextualised in the veneration of Jesus' earthly body: of course, also here a dead body, which itself carries additional multiple connotations of body and spirit, death and life. It is clear that the Renaissance Magdalene is the agent of a deeply ambiguous and paradoxical interaction with Jesus' body, the most undecidable body in the imagery of Western art. A particularly striking example can be found in a painting by Giovanni Bellini which depicts Jesus' anointing, the site of touch between the Magdalene and Jesus, a moment which receives particular emphasis as the saint, flushed and in a state of extreme emotion, sensuously rubs ointment into the wounds on Jesus'

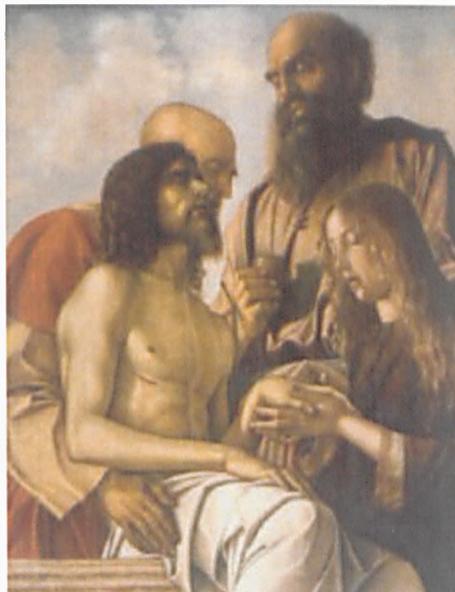


Fig. 25: Giovanni Bellini, 'Lament over the dead Christ', 1473 - 76, Vatican Pinacotheca, Vatican City

hands. The painting evokes an almost disturbing emotional and erotic power.¹⁰⁹

This access to the paradoxical touch of Jesus, having given the saint a strange and evocative status among other popular female saints popular, altered in the seventeenth century. The principal powerful guise of the Magdalene shifted, from the interaction with Jesus, to the moment in which she is herself between the human and the divine, where the boundaries of body and spirit, self and other, are transgressed within her own body – the experience of ecstasy.¹¹⁰ Unlike other ecstatics, like Teresa, Agnes, or Agatha, the Magdalene was a gospel figure and not a mystic in the traditionally understood sense. It is precisely because of the Magdalene's paradoxical status as the site of the interaction between body and spirit in relation to the body of Jesus, that the interrogation of the saint's own female gendered body on similar terms raises more specifically nuanced questions about this ultimate site of undecidability between body and spirit.



Fig. 26: Titian, 'Penitent Magdalene', 1530-35, Palazzo Pitti, Florence

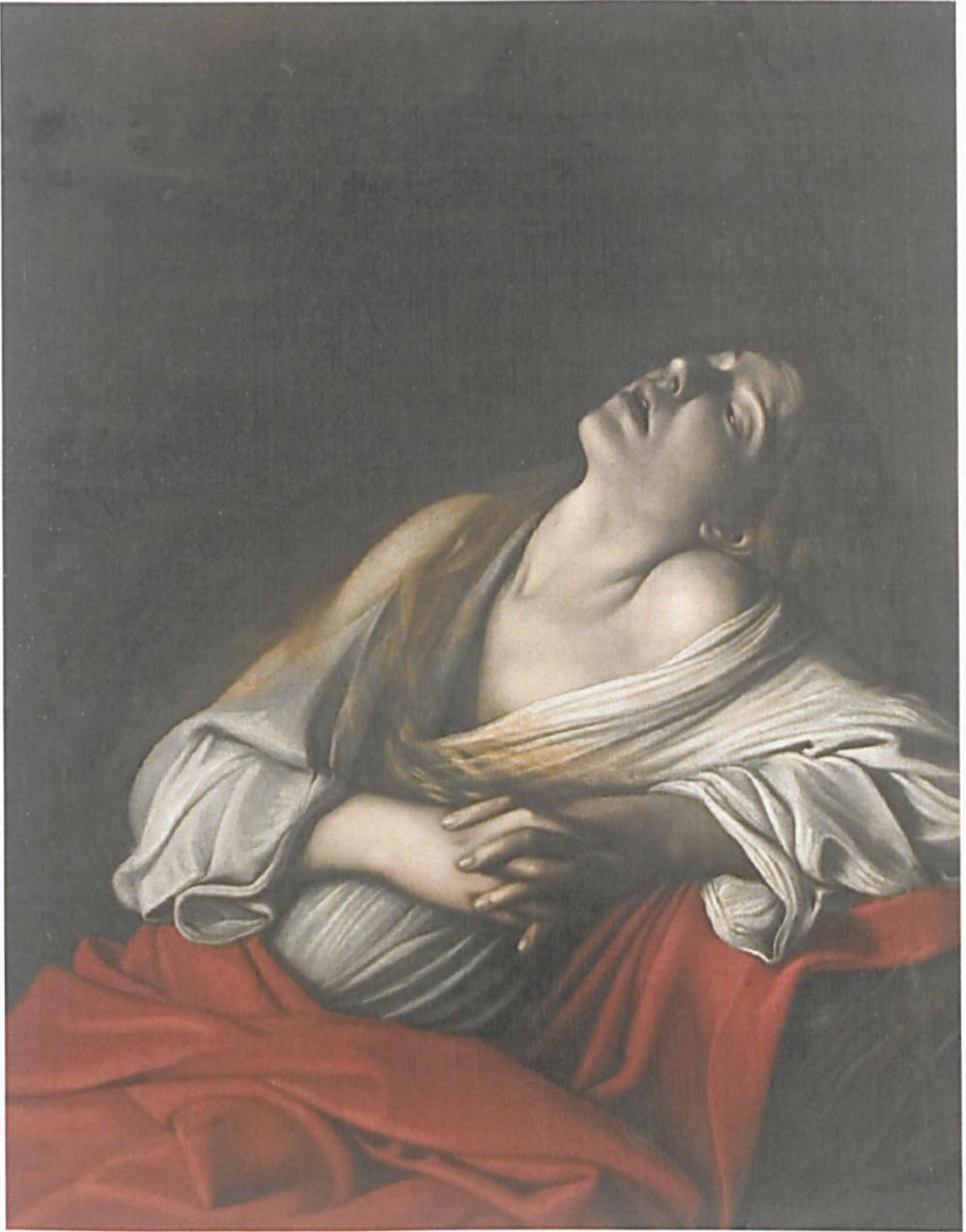


Fig. 27: Caravaggio, 'Magdalene in ecstasy', 1606, Croce collection, Rome

'Caravaggesque'

In 1606 Caravaggio is known to have painted a *Magdalene in Ecstasy*. The formerly best-known version, in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Marseilles, is attributed to one of

Caravaggio's copyists, Ludovicus Finson. However, a more compelling version in a private collection has recently been widely exhibited as a Caravaggio (Fig. 27).¹¹¹ In this painting, a visual rhetoric of ecstasy has been created which changes the visual status of the body of the saint. In previous *Magdalenes*, such as the seminal examples by Donatello (Fig. 28) or Titian (Fig. 26), the body was either a document of the saint's self-denial for the sake of asceticism and penitence, or a site of temptation and of the conflict between fleshly and spiritual desire. In the *Marseilles Magdalene*, however, the visual mode has shifted, and the movements, shapes or spasms of the body become exterior codes, or indicators of a profoundly interior experience. The power of this rhetoric is in the multivalence of the body's abandon; it invites readings on many different levels and it produces many different meanings; as a result, it both fascinates and disturbs viewers. The play of intense emotions written on the surface of the Magdalene's body, like the surface of a mirror, is activated and attributed meaning when it becomes subject to the gaze. The origins of Mary Magdalene's ecstasy are left open to interpretation in Caravaggio's vision of the scene. The absence of visual attributes in the painting to justify her experience makes this one of the most ascetic images of ecstasy of the seventeenth century, and one where the viewer is obliged to realize the intensity of the experience from the movement of her body alone. The blackness around her encloses her in privacy, and the striking realism, in particular of her eyelids and slightly visible teeth, breaks the conventions of the ideal – we could call these elements 'Caravaggesque'. There is a strong sense of intrusion, heightened by the shadows of the chiaroscuro from which the saint's skin emerges almost shockingly pale, but also by the sense that, through her half-open eyes, the saint may or may not be aware of the viewer's presence. We recall Aldous Huxley's response to the sculpture *Ludovica Albertoni*: 'the spectator feels a shock of embarrassment... one has the impression of having opened a bedroom door at the most inopportune of moments'.¹¹² In the paradoxical visual experience the image produces, carnal yet spiritual, intimate yet distanced, performed yet bodily, it disrupts the subject-object operation of the gaze – it must be re-framed in order to encompass these effects.



Fig. 28: Donatello, 'Mary Magdalen', 1453-5, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence

Savoldo's *Magdalene* was described as the ultimate in artistic artifice; seen in these terms it would seem to have very little in common with the tactile bodiliness of the Caravaggio painting. I propose, however, that the term 'Caravaggesque', often understood in a general sense to refer to the specific form of chiaroscuro and realism for which Caravaggio is particularly known, could be expanded to encompass a specific quality within visuality which is encapsulated both by the painting of the artist 'Caravaggio' and by the figurative phenomenon of Mary Magdalene. I use the expression here, beyond ideas of the specific artist and his oeuvre, in terms of a specific rhetoric of paradoxical bodily 'real'-performance, a quality of fictive bodily 'truth', found in representations of the ecstatic saints, which involves a body suspended between opposing states such as life and death, and pleasure and pain.

'Exteriorising' identification

A viewer confronted with these two contrasting *Magdalenes*, in different ways paradoxically situated at the cusp of a Baroque visuality, encounters a complicated mirroring network. A commentary referring to Bernini's *Ecstasy of St. Teresa*, completely out of the context of traditional academic responses, may here provide a portrayal of the functioning of visual memory; it inadvertently broaches a complex system of mirror, empathy and role model responses to the figure of the ecstatic saint, which I have brought to the foreground. Andrew Greeley, an American priest and sociologist who among other causes champions erotic (rather than pornographic) art as the route to a healthy intra-marital erotic life, offers the following fantasy scenario in a modest sexual advice article for his parishioners:

Thus a woman who views Bernini's St. Teresa and understands what the artist is doing will surely recall her own orgasmic experiences and note with interest what the metaphor implies. Moreover she may find herself in the beginnings of sexual arousal and yearn for another orgasmic experience. Whether her husband will be sensitive enough to the artist's designs to recognize the similarity between the Saint's expression and his memory of his wife's expression may be less certain, because men are less perceptive in these matters than women. If he does, it is possible that he too will feel the beginnings of sexual arousal.¹¹³

The mise-en-scene inspired by the *Teresa* and fantasised by Greeley produces a rather patronising idea of sexual arousal couched in clichéd terms; however, the



Fig. 29 – see ref. Fig. 1

establish the ‘“masculinisation” of the spectator position’ when the woman observes her own pleasure from the viewpoint of a lover.¹¹⁴ For Laura Mulvey, Freud’s portrayal of women’s oscillating identity between active and passive, and the conventions of masculinity and femininity, influence the modes of identification operating in a woman’s gaze upon a female protagonist – ultimately that ‘the female spectator’s fantasy of masculinisation [is] at cross-purposes with itself, restless in its transvestite clothes’.¹¹⁵ I feel however that Greeley’s fantasy scenario leaves the female spectator’s means of recognition more tantalisingly complex.

Beyond Mulvey’s conclusion of a troubled and oscillating identity to account for the logic of identification operating here, I look to Kaja Silverman, who like Bal brings the metaphor of the mirror into play. Drawing on Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage, Silverman emphasises that the ego itself is a representation of a representation.¹¹⁶ Identity itself, in this view, being constructed as both other and same, the mirror can work as a metaphor for the construction of a self-image which is both visual and knowingly fictive. In this way, an ‘exteriorising’ identification (the ‘recognition’ of the fantasised self in the *Teresa*, for instance), is accessible to a female viewer because of the monolithic nature of the masculine ego, according to the Freudian model: she has greater freedom of identification than her male counterpart, and can suspend her identification on the brink between the passivity of the love object and the active nature of the gaze’s subject.¹¹⁷

Greeley reads the *Teresa* as a paradigm of the visual codification of women’s pleasure, and assumes that women’s visualisation of their own sexual behaviour itself will inevitably conform to the trope. At the same time, while attributing to Bernini the ‘design’

mechanisms of viewing imagined in the extract provide an interesting counterpoint to academic responses to the sculpture, for the most part locked in unproductive debate about the sexual suggestiveness of the pose. Greeley not only explicitly imagines the ambiguous sculpture arousing its viewers, but the way in which this arousal is operated is seen as being specifically through recognition. The wife in the scenario is assumed visually to recognise an image which she could not possibly have actually seen – that of her own pleasure. This mise-en-scene of gaze and desire could be seen to

to represent female pleasure ('what the artist is doing'), Greeley perceives that the husband will simply not make the connection. The implication of Greeley's scenario is that, for the formation of the visual discourse of pleasure, the fantasy identification performed in the 'mirror' by the female viewer is paradoxically stronger than the man's real visual experience. A gaze upon the body of the ecstatic saint does not function as a gaze into a mirror at one's own body in pleasure, but participates in the construction of a complex play of identification: an inner gaze at an interior experience, which can not have been experienced visually except by a fictive, fantasised gaze from outside the self.

Excessive empathy, bodily ecstasy

The seventeenth-century Caravaggio *Magdalene*, like Bernini's *Teresa*, also transgressed contemporary limits of reflection and empathy. It appears to have been seen as threatening even at the time of its creation because of its potential for excessive empathetic fantasy. Here, it is to the asceticism of the image that the blame is attributed. Jean Habert summarises the controversy surrounding the painting:

This revolutionary creation caused a considerable stir – it was the most copied of all Caravaggio's paintings, in particular amongst the Northern artists working in Italy, less inhibited than their counterparts. Among them, the Flemish painter Louis Finson (Bruges before 1580 - Amsterdam 1617) saw himself as the primary copyist of the painting. However, the painting did not in fact enjoy any real posterity: copies and subsequent adaptations no longer dared to portray the saint alone and without attributes. Instead they conformed to the 1582 recommendations of the Bishop of Bologna, the cardinal Gabriele Paleotti (1522-1597), principal advocate of the Counter-Reformation as far as iconography was concerned. He endorsed the representation of saints in ecstasy [...] with their attributes and lifted up by angels, in order to clearly indicate the nature of their mystical experience as being inaccessible to ordinary mortals.¹¹⁸

Indeed, the ecstasy of the *Magdalene* as envisioned by Caravaggio was so intimate and bodily – so 'Caravaggesque', as it were – as to be seen as being threatening to the Catholic church in the context of sixteenth-century religious politics. According to Bishop Paleotti, therefore, it was the threat of excessive empathy which frightened artists away from making straightforward copies of the painting and which led to the 'supernaturalisation' of ecstasy. It was vital that religious experiences should be seen as being unequivocally divinely inspired, and Caravaggio's *Magdalene*, collapsed back on the ground, is accessing a very intimate form of the divine. In contrast, even the year before

Caravaggio's composition, Giovanni Lanfranco had painted a *Magdalene in Ecstasy* where the saint is being physically carried up to heaven by angels for her daily spiritual sustenance while a penitent in the desert, just as the *Golden Legend* relates:

...our Redeemer did show it openly, that he had ordained for her refection celestial, and no bodily meats. And every day at every hour canonical she was lifted up in the air of angels, and heard the glorious song of the heavenly companies with her bodily ears. Of which she was fed and filled with right sweet meats, and then was brought again by the angels unto her proper place, in such wise as she had no need of corporal nourishing.¹¹⁹

The literality which runs through both text and painting – although she is to have ‘no bodily meats’ she hears the angels’ song ‘with her bodily ears’ – reveals perhaps the temptation in the Baroque to emphasise the physical, bodily nature of the Magdalene's ecstasy despite its apparent divine origin and purely ‘ec-static’ conditions.¹²⁰ Caravaggio, however, innovates by conveying the ‘literal’ carrying up into heaven through the force of a young woman's physical yearning.

The threat posed by the *Magdalene* is that of excessive empathy with an emphatically corporeal body, experiencing an ecstasy which is

ambiguous in its physical and spiritual pleasure or pain, of mysterious and ineffable origin and which may be too ‘real’ to be safely viewed. An autonomous pleasure, activated visually, inevitably introduces questions of the concept of the mirror. The sight of an ecstatic body, suspended both present and absent, both physical and spiritual, sets in motion a fantasised interplay of the gaze, where the viewer's own body is itself the product of the gaze network. An infinity of mirrors, where the body is simultaneously both subject and object of the gaze; gazing at another body, it constructs itself as *seen*. In this way, the



Fig. 30: Giovanni Lanfranco, ‘Magdalene in Ecstasy’, c. 1605, Galleria Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples

body's status as a subjective *site* of the gaze is paradoxically enabled by the body's fictive identification as an *object* of a fantasised gaze.

In the lore surrounding the Magdalene, on the moment of her conversion and penitence she rejected worldly goods. Caravaggio took up this theme in his *Conversion of the Magdalene* in Detroit, where the saint touches, but does not look into, a dark convex mirror while listening to the theological persuasion of her companion Martha.¹²¹



Fig. 31: Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, 'The Conversion of the Magdalene', c. 1597-8, The Detroit Institute of Arts

Mieke Bal puts this image in counterpoint with a slightly earlier *Magdalene* by Caravaggio, in Rome (Fig. 33), in a chapter on the myth of Narcissus. In the Rome *Magdalene*, the saint has abandoned worldly goods (she has let gold and pearl jewellery fall to the ground beside her) and sits, her arms in her lap forming a frame continued by her auburn hair and drooping head, in melancholy. For Bal, this frame forms a metaphorical mirror where this Magdalene, having rejected the actual mirror, turns her melancholy in towards herself. Unlike Caravaggio's contemporary painting *Narcissus* (Fig. 32), whose bodily ego becomes fragmented in his hopeless pursuit of his own image, this *Magdalene* 'is able to sustain the wholeness that the primary narcissism of the mirror experience

extends to the subject...'¹²²

Bal explains, citing Kaja Silverman's *The Threshold of the Visible World*, that when the Magdalene becomes the mirror, she does not enter the long-established binary of lack versus plenitude into which women are traditionally coerced to fit:

...lack, so that the male subject's phallic attributes can be oppositionally articulated; plenitude, so that she can become adequate to his desire.' This sadistic, because impossible, model is culturally embodied on the one hand by Venus, and on the other by the Virgin-Mother.¹²³



Fig. 32: Caravaggio, 'Narcissus', 1594-96, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome

Bal writes, however, that 'the price to pay for wholeness is the absence of consciousness...'.¹²⁴ While the Rome *Magdalene* remains 'a figure of transgression and conversion' she nevertheless remains unconscious, 'she does not 'know herself'', she remains passive; '[The *Magdalene*] represents the passive receptivity of the mirror as a gender-specific projection screen for the production of an illusory, exterior wholeness.'¹²⁵

This is reminiscent of Mary Pardo's characterisation of Savoldo's *Magdalene* as an empty device; 'it does not pretend to 'contain' truth,

only to reflect it; its ostensible content is wholly exterior to it'.¹²⁶ While I follow Bal's analysis, following Silverman, that the *Magdalene's* bodily wholeness is fictive in the sense



Fig. 33: Caravaggio, 'Penitent Magdalene', c. 1594-7, Galleria Doria Pamphilj, Rome

that she is no longer slave to the ‘lack versus plenitude’ model of femininity, I feel that it is reductive to state that Caravaggio’s Rome *Magdalene* remains trapped within the unstable equilibrium which her passivity provides in the face of her rejection of the mirror, or that she can only be a mirror within herself at the price of ‘knowing herself’. This conclusion reminded me of Lacan’s famous comment on Bernini’s *Teresa*; ‘It is clear that the essential testimony of the mystics is that they are experiencing it but know nothing about it.’¹²⁷

Active passivity

It is on this question of knowing or not knowing the self, that the whole issue turns: whether the experience of ecstasy, or indeed the bodily experience of touching and recognising the resurrected Christ, can be an embodied, as well as bodily, experience. I argue that when Caravaggio’s *Magdalenes* become mirrors, it is not a passive, unknowing unconsciousness but rather an active one. This moment is captured by the artist’s *Conversion of the Magdalene* in Detroit – the dark mirror which the Magdalene is rejecting, reflects nothing but a square window – its liquid blackness seeming to absorb all light. The



Fig. 34 – see ref. Fig. 31

saint’s face is misleadingly passive: a poised emptiness suspended between listening to Martha’s argument and meditating on her own sins, it takes the place of the empty mirror. Her downcast eyes reflect both her sister’s intellectual earnestness and the light from the window being shed upon her own dissolute life.

To assume that apparent unconsciousness is passive, is to overlook the body of imagery surrounding the figure of Mary Magdalene, and the extraordinary symbolic allusions which enfold her image, in terms of her transgression of body and spirit as the one who touches the risen Christ. It is her action of rejecting the physical mirror, enabling her to transgress all that it represents in terms of Narcissistic worldliness, which enables her to internalise and absorb its power to destabilise the play of focalisers in visuality.¹²⁸ The ‘Caravaggesque’ Magdalene gains wholeness at the price of the ‘real’. Instead the ‘real’ becomes an ‘air de vérité’,¹²⁹ and the ‘Caravaggesque’ becomes a cipher at many levels, signifying a performance of fictive bodilyness in which the Magdalene is complicit.

The unconsciousness of both *Magdalenes* transgresses mere 'sleep' (Bal describes Caravaggio's Rome *Magdalene* as 'sleeping') to become, instead, an altered state where the exterior appearance of the body becomes undecidable, controversial, and multivalent, combining in one the visual discourses of pain, death, pleasure, sleep, melancholy, ecstasy, precisely because it is no longer attempting to signify a 'real' body, but 'Caravaggesque' suspension of bodily reality. Instead the exterior unconsciousness is a metaphor for an interior experience which is too intense to otherwise conceive of visually. This is also what happens when the woman in Andrew Greeley's fantasy looks into the mirror of Bernini's *Teresa* and sees her memory of pleasure, whereas the man may not recognise at all a physical body he has surely seen. Pleasure is written onto the body of the ecstatic saint and also beyond that body in a fictive, symbolic layering.

Savoldo's *Magdalene* was painted too early to interact with Caravaggio's *Magdalenes* in the discourse of ecstasy they set up. Nevertheless, the term 'Caravaggesque' traverses the before and after of the Caravaggio 'moment' just as the visual discourse of ecstasy, in the Foucauldian sense, is a network of relations and connections.¹³⁰ Savoldo certainly combines these 'Caravaggesque' elements in his exploration of *Magdalene* visuality, in the great symbolic depth of the London painting. This *Magdalene* is a mirror – but neither reflecting the viewer nor herself. Instead the viewer is implicated, via the commanding gaze of the saint, in a three-way interaction where the missing third party, the resurrected Christ, is depicted as light – incomprehensible to us, unless it is mirrored, reflected, and translated by the *Magdalene*.

'Those who have not seen'

It is, in fact, back in the dense prose of the Gospel of John that the seeds of the *Magdalene's* unique role lie. It is in verse 20 that the meeting between the saint and the resurrected Jesus takes place, starting with the *Magdalene's* failure to recognise him; '...she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know it was Jesus.'¹³¹ Jesus himself, this time, then seems to feign ignorance; 'Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."¹³²

Their meeting then proceeds by each verbally recognising the other; ‘Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father.”’¹³³ This verbal recognition between them, preceded by a visual misrecognition, is then very shortly followed by the scene of the doubting of St. Thomas, this time a tactile recognition of a Jesus who is still very bodily in his state between death and life, as Jesus invites the apostle to touch his wounds. Here, however, it is Jesus himself who then denigrates the visual, saying to Thomas, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.’¹³⁴

These repeated reflections, recognitions and misrecognitions surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus as depicted in the Gospel of John disrupt the whole mechanism of vision. The Magdalene becomes a holder of a knowing gaze through becoming the *object* of a knowing gaze, which is itself enabled by her own recognising gaze. It is thanks to the Magdalene’s recognition that the message of Jesus’ resurrection is passed on to the other disciples; in the Gnostic gospels the Magdalene says to the disciples, ‘What is hidden from you, I will proclaim to you.’¹³⁵

The paradoxical simultaneity of gazes in the Garden of Gethsemane encapsulates the meaning of the Magdalene. Rather than being an empty screen, guilelessly failing to know Jesus, the ‘Caravaggesque’ Magdalene of Savoldo’s painting is an embodied site of knowledge who, while turning *about to* meet Jesus’ gaze, on the brink of seeing him, meets the viewer’s gaze and *already knows*; and ‘proclaims’ her understanding to the viewer of Savoldo’s painting as that paradoxical, powerful gaze smiles knowingly out of the picture frame. ‘*Those who have not seen*’. The ‘Caravaggesque’ *Magdalene*, whether the *Magdalene* of Savoldo (Fig. 35), with her reflective cloak, or the dark *Magdalene* in the throes of ecstasy (Fig. 27), transgresses the conventional opposition of the knowing artist and submissive subject. Here the subject of the painting



Fig. 35 – see ref. Fig. 24

has gained an effect of agency: she is complicit in the fiction of her own painted space and her paradoxical bodily existence. The position she assumes in the mythology of Jesus’ resurrection, while her own body in ecstasy interrogates the nature of embodied experience,

is the nucleus of knowledge at the crux of a gaze network – an embodied knowledge which, through the trope of the mirror, conveys through reflection the indescribable experience of the transgression of body and spirit.

In the last paragraph of ‘Through the Looking Glass’, Alice wonders who it was who dreamed her adventures: herself or the Red King, since ‘He was part of my dream, of course--but then I was part of his dream, too!’¹³⁶ Magdalene through the looking glass enables just such a bodily cross-subjectivity. Thanks to Savoldo and the ‘Caravaggesque’, she, like Alice, can step between the two worlds; ‘And certainly the glass WAS beginning to melt away, just like a bright silvery mist.’¹³⁷

The air of truth: the Marquis de Sade

I have set up Mary Magdalene in these arguments as a figure whose representation has the potential to raise the suggestion of an embodied subjectivity in representation, and who challenges and engages the viewer within a gaze network. This is not, however, to endorse the position of analysts such as Lacan, conflating the historical person St. Teresa of Avila with the writings attributed to that person, or the visual representations of her, up to the sculpture by Bernini. The equivocality which Vuarnet eroticised and delighted in, debases and obscures yet ironically exposes a woman whose identity, so bound up in the visual myth surrounding it, stumbles between a representation of a person and an abstract symbol:

Saint Teresa, talking about herself, exhibiting herself in the book entitled *My life*, Bernini exhibiting her, or even myself talking about them both; yet we are not talking about the same thing. The real Teresa was the medium (*le support*) of a multiple truth (somewhere between the saint, the woman, and the shameful woman), the repetitions of which, however laudable they may be, are not necessarily any less ridiculous or parodying as a result.¹³⁸

Vuarnet like others before him claims to know the real Teresa behind the layers of ‘parodic’ representation. His claim to her simultaneously obscures her while erotically fetishising that which detours away from any notion of subjecthood: ‘this equivocality... of course makes us love her - of course, not with a very pure or a very honest love’.¹³⁹

The Marquis de Sade writes about Bernini’s *St. Teresa* in his *Voyage d’Italie*:

It is a masterpiece by Bernini. This piece is sublime because of the air of truth which characterises it, but it is necessary to remind oneself deeply (*se pénétrer*),

when seeing it, that it is a saint, because from the ecstatic appearance of Teresa, from the fire which embraces her features, it would be easy to be mistaken.¹⁴⁰

A sense of irony pervades Sade's statement that 'it would be easy to be mistaken'. Sade specifically appreciates the 'truth' of the sculpture – truth equated with sublimity – it is sublime because it has an air of truth. Sade's subtle analysis here evokes the struggle of moral society to integrate sexuality and Christianity. His account of an instinctive and sublime revelation of 'truth', combined with an ironised simultaneous repression of another 'easy' interpretation to the canonical one, encapsulates some sense of what is occurring during the process of viewing the sculpture. It conveys the sense that the sculpture is evoking an elemental truth, layered with society's givens about what the nature of religion should be and the individual's act of self-censorship according to what response is appropriate. Sade, an anarchic thinker, saw religion and indeed civilisation as corrupt, and used extreme forms of amoral sexuality in his writings as a means to shed light on the hypocrisy of society. Monks and bishops are portrayed as particularly sadistic and sexually corrupt: sexual libertinage, and beyond that complete amorality and lack of empathy leading to extreme forms of cruelty and murder, is portrayed as the truth of humanity. If humans are not libertines (such as Justine, who wants to be pure but finds it increasingly impossible) it is because of a falsely enforced morality, enforced by religion. Morality is inherently meaningless: injustices keep happening to the just, proving that there is no real justice: virtue is a meaningless and hopeless act.¹⁴¹ However, the ironic sympathy with which Justine's struggle is portrayed conveys a similar tone to that of the writer who gently reminds the reader not to be mistaken – an acknowledgement of the cultural imperatives of society viewed by an outsider.

Sade praises the 'truth' of the *Teresa* where others have revelled in her ambiguity. Sade, perhaps uniquely among commentators of the *Teresa*, has pinpointed the moment when the sublime, the nature of what for him has defined it as a masterpiece, is located in the act of viewing, as an internal collision between instinct (visual recognition of erotic passion) and culture (acknowledgment of Christian morality). Neither elevating nor debasing Saint Teresa, Sade is one of the few – because situated outside of that discourse – not to conflate image and the woman. The expression 'air of truth' attempts to account for the fictive carnality, which I identified in Caravaggio's *Magdalene* (Fig. 27), of a marble sculpture which brings into tangible visibility an account of an intangible vision – while locating the sculpture's 'sublimity' precisely in this paradoxical notion of truth.

Histories of art

Throughout this chapter I have demonstrated various forms of art history struggling to come to terms with the nature of their subject matter. The question of feminine figures represented at the crux of discourses of sexuality, corporeality and sacrality poses a profound challenge to a tradition of art history which has confined the female body to certain societally approved roles. In particular, the female body in visuality construed as a sentient presence, a representation not of an object or surface for male desire but of a site of identity and knowledge, challenges many of the assumptions constructed within the history of art and within visual culture as a whole – and in particular because this visual construction is achieved by a profound ambiguity and putting-into-question of literal and traditional concepts of ‘meaning’.

David Freedberg chooses to reject academic forms of art history completely, and discusses the ambiguous status of the two sculptures by Bernini as being at the heart of the issue: ‘...we may have difficulty in distinguishing between erotic and spiritual love (and everyone would agree how perfectly this is illustrated by a sculpture such as Bernini’s *Saint Teresa*, or his *Blessed Ludovica Albertoni* for that matter.)’¹⁴²

Freedberg explicitly states that his work falls outside art history and indeed uncompromisingly distances himself from it when he states,

My concern is with those responses that are subject to repression because they are too embarrassing, too blatant, too rude, and too uncultured... these are the kinds of response that form the subject of this book, not the intellectual constructions of critic and scholar, or the literate sensitivity of the generally cultured.¹⁴³

He opens *The Power of Images*, indeed, with the following proposed incongruity: ‘This book is not about the history of art. It is about the relations between images and people in history.’¹⁴⁴

Freedberg’s description of his work as ‘raids on neighbouring disciplines’ underlines the sense in which this work still maintains what Griselda Pollock described in 1988 as ‘a complete communication breakdown between art historians working still within the normative discipline and those who are contesting the paradigm’. Rejecting traditional art history wholesale merely perpetrates such division. Calling instead for a ‘paradigm shift’ within art history, Pollock suggested ‘that we no longer think of a feminist art history but a feminist intervention in the histories of art’.¹⁴⁵ Writing in 1971, Linda Nochlin was

among the first to powerfully identify feminist theory as the element needed to destabilise the status quo:

A feminist critique of the discipline is needed which can pierce cultural-ideological limitations, to reveal biases and inadequacies not merely in regard to the question of women artists, but in the formulation of the crucial questions of the discipline as a whole. Thus the so-called woman question, far from being a peripheral sub-issue, can become a catalyst, a potent intellectual instrument, probing the most basic and 'natural' assumptions, providing a paradigm for other kinds of internal questioning, and providing links with paradigms established by radical approaches in other fields.¹⁴⁶

It is no longer possible to consider feminist art histories as 'adding women to art history'.¹⁴⁷ Instead feminist theories can fill the need in art history for a key element to intervene to modify the terms of reference which have forced the discipline into deadlock. Lynda Nead's response to Sir Kenneth Clark's book *The Nude* is but one example of such an intervention. The simple fact that, for Clark, a figure of the art historical establishment, a 'nude' was automatically understood to be a female nude, says much about the discipline's attitude towards the female body in representation; as Nead remarks, 'It is in the process of dropping the gender prefix – the moment when the female nude becomes simply 'the nude' – that the male identity of artist and connoisseur, creator and consumer of the female body, is fully installed'.¹⁴⁸ Nead's 1992 book *The Female Nude* is a seminal example of how feminist intervention into and deconstruction of some of the most potent of traditions of western art can open up and deepen understanding of the relationships between visual culture, sexuality and identity.

The dichotomy I have brought to light, throughout the analysis of Bernini's *Teresa* and *Ludovica* and through suggestions of a 'Caravaggesque' *Magdalene*, reinforces the same discourse. If the female body in representation is suggested as embodied, powerful, multiple, evocative, or disturbing, it must be reduced to either a carnal object of lust, or its alternative, fetishistic annihilation in bodiless, uncorrupted chastity. The work of reinstating the status of the female body in visuality as a profound site of meaning is a major concern of this thesis, and what must be developed alongside this project is a questioning and revelation of practices and attitudes within the discipline which reinforce harmful, stereotypical, or even violent attitudes towards the female body.

The Warburgian Magdalene and the *Pathosformel*

The subject of an art historical debate about the possibility of multiple and contradictory meanings in art for centuries, in her assigned cultural roles as part-prostitute, part-holy woman, Mary Magdalene may also have herself participated in the construction of an alternative form of art history. Sir Joshua Reynolds, writing around the same time as Sade, was perhaps the first to acknowledge the curious paradox hidden in the origins of the Magdalene's modes of representation in the Italian Renaissance:

There is a figure of a Bacchante leaning backward, her head thrown quite behind her, which seems to be a favourite invention, as it is so frequently repeated in bassorelievos, cameos, and intaglios; it is intended to express an enthusiastic frantic kind of joy. This figure Baccio Bandinelli, in a drawing that I have of that Master of the Descent from the Cross, has adopted (and he knew very well what was worth borrowing) for one of the Maries, to express frantic agony of grief. It is curious to observe, and it is certainly true, that the extremes of contrary passions are with little variation expressed by the same action.¹⁴⁹



Fig. 36: Sir Joshua Reynolds, sketch, British Museum, Print Room

Reynolds also experimented with such a figure in his own notes (Fig. 36). His observation, tracing this metaphor through the fifteenth century in the work of Bandinelli, is echoed centuries later in the work of cultural historian Aby Warburg. Warburg saw the Magdalene as a crucial example of a 'survival' of an antique form whose meaning is dramatically shifted in its Renaissance incarnation – the pagan symbol of wild lust, intoxication and violence, become a sign of mourning and Christian love.¹⁵⁰ Georges Didi-Huberman theorises Warburg's work in terms of the Freudian concept of the symptom:

When Warburg rests his eyes on a pathetic Mary Magdalene [sic] by Niccolo dell'Arca (Fig. 37), Donatello, or Bertoldo di Giovanni, it becomes clear that gestural 'expression' is only symbolic in that it is first *symptomatic*. Here, the gestural formula 'expresses' solely to crystallize a moment of intensity for the female saint, which appears, above all, as a veritable *rupture in the symbolic order* of evangelical history. It is the moment of a *contretemps* in which the unbridled desire of Antique maenads is repeated in Mary Magdalene's [sic] body. It is the gesture of a counter-movement which recalls, in Mary Magdalene's [sic] body, a paganism that is duly ignored by the entire symbolic content – the sacrifice of the incarnate Word. Therefore, it seems to be a question of something like a symptom.¹⁵¹



Fig. 37: Niccolò dell'Arca, 'The Lamentation of Christ', detail of St. Mary Magdalene, c. 1480, Santa Maria della Vita, Bologna

Didi-Huberman is referring here to the Warburgian concept of *Pathosformel*, a visual form which carries with it strong emotion through time and culture.¹⁵² For Didi-Huberman, it is structured in the Freudian terms of the return of a repressed event or emotion, in the form of a symptom. This would also account for incongruities of simultaneous meaning: for instance here, pagan wild ecstatic desire and Christian love, mourning and sacrifice. The force of desire of the maenads must find outlets for expression, even when disrupting traditional modes. Rather than metamorphosing into another form, and replacing traditional notions of artistic influence, Warburg introduced concepts of

'survival' or 'afterlife' of certain types of gestures or details, counter to the traditional structure of art history since outside of linear or sequential structures of meaning.

Warburg's concept of survival assumed a temporal model for art history radically different from any employed at the time. He thereby introduced the problem of memory into the *longue durée* of the history of motifs and images: a problem that (as Warburg himself observed) transcends turning points in historiography and boundaries between cultures.¹⁵³

Didi-Huberman's understanding of the concept of time in the work of Aby Warburg contradicts previous interpretations such as those by Gombrich and Panofsky. As Johnnie Gratton summarises,

...[Didi-Huberman] finds fault with the distinction drawn by Benjamin Buchloh between the models of time implied in the *Atlas* and those promoted by avant-gardist thought. For Buchloh, the *Atlas* sets up 'a model of historical memory and continuity of experience' quite opposed to the models of modernity, understood as 'providing instantaneous presence, shock, and perceptual rupture'. For Didi-Huberman, this opposition stems from a dubious postmodernist credo inspired by Jean Baudrillard. Not only does it over-schematize the very history of modern avant-garde movements, it also fails to grasp the meaning given to the concept of memory by Warburg, as well as by certain of his contemporaries such as Freud and Walter Benjamin. Once we get beyond these misunderstandings, claims Didi-Huberman, we can begin to appreciate the *Mnemosyne Atlas* as constituting in its own way, and in its own right, an 'avant-garde object'. And this, not because it breaks with the past (this is clearly not the case), but because it breaks with a

certain way of ‘thinking the past’: ‘La rupture warburgienne consiste précisément à avoir *pensé le temps lui-même comme un montage* d’éléments hétérogènes : telle est la leçon anthropologique des “formations de survivance”, à quoi répond si bien, sur le plan métapsychologique, celle des “formations de symptôme”’.¹⁵⁴ ...Thus, according to his French advocate, Warburg’s returning pathos formulae must be assessed as bearers of temporal disorientation, and not as elements explicable within an evolutionary or evolutionist model of time, nor indeed as elements functional within an art-historical periodizing project. In short, these resurgent formulae ‘anachronize’ and ‘complexify’ history itself.¹⁵⁵

Scholars since Warburg have taken up the *Pathosformel* concept, but not always in the temporal sense of heterogeneous rupture understood by Didi-Huberman. Avigdor Posèq uses the concept to argue that Caravaggio’s *Magdalene* (Fig. 27), derives from an antique relief representing the abduction of the Leucippides.¹⁵⁶ Stating that Caravaggio was looking for an antique model in order to avoid the trend of sexualised *Magdalenes* which were very popular in the Renaissance, Posèq characterises the painting as a ‘spiritually ravished Magdalene, modelled on a mythological victim of rape’.¹⁵⁷ Associating the *Magdalene*’s posture with a depiction of a mythological sexual assault, Posèq grounds any subsequent analysis of the painting throughout the article, through references to these iconographic precedents. He cites Warburg’s concept of the *Pathosformel* and goes on to state that Caravaggio’s innovation in using this particular antique model was to influence artists such as Bernini in their depictions of religious ecstasy.

Problematically, the corollary of Posèq’s method is the assumption that religious ecstasy is straightforwardly visually analogous to an act of sexual violence: in this reading, the viewer is assumed to readily frame the ecstatic female body not merely as passive but as violated, and to deduce the woman’s pleasure in that assault. Where some art historians interpreted Bernini’s *Teresa* as orgasmic, Posèq’s purely connoisseurial article blithely adds a darker tone, and removes all possible agency from the depicted woman who is ‘assaulted’ by her experience of vision or rapture. Posèq frames it so that Caravaggio inaugurates a history of imagery propagating that distortion. It is an attempt to ‘solve’



Fig. 38 – see ref. Fig. 27

a profoundly ambiguous painting which instead inscribes it into one of the darkest manipulations of patriarchal visual culture.

Rather than opening up the painting's sombre feel, and ambiguous sense of death mingling with the impression of sensual abandon to any further analysis, Posèq rejects any gestural influence from antique sculptures of Niobids (such as Fig. 39), an interpretation put forward by Marini, in favour of a precise formal relation: 'the upright postures of these statues offer no comparison to the "Magdalene"'.¹⁵⁸ Marini also suggested the Vatican 'Sleeping Ariadne' (Fig. 40) as a model.¹⁵⁹ Posèq discounts this, although acknowledging a similar 'effect'.

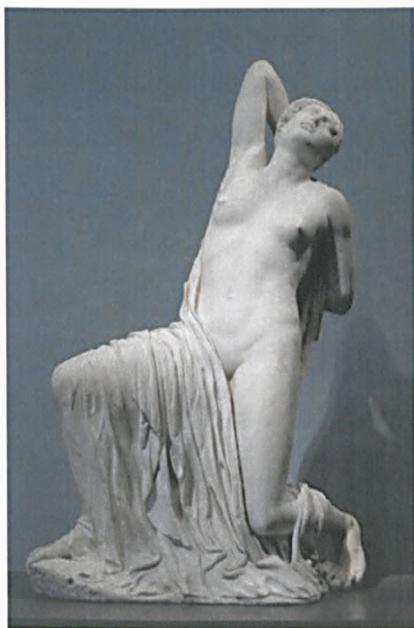


Fig. 39: Unknown Artist (Greek), 'Wounded Niobid', c. 440 BC, Palazzo Massimo alle Terme (Museo Nazionale Romano), Rome



Fig. 40: 'Sleeping Ariadne', Roman copy of a Hellenistic work, 2nd century, Vatican Museums, Vatican City, Gallerie delle Statue

I wish to bring to the forefront here what is at stake with this traditional form of connoisseurial art history, which seeks an identification of the sources as an end in itself. Posèq concludes that the original combination of a classical source with a contemporary gestural language, which he has traced in the clasped hands, is at the source of the compelling power of the painting.¹⁶⁰ This is to undermine the many levels upon which the painting operates, as well as to the meaning of Warburg's concept of the *Pathosformel*. A *Pathosformel* is a survival of emotion *within* form: Giorgio Agamben defines it as 'an indissoluble intertwining of an emotional charge and an iconographic formula in which it is impossible to distinguish between form and content.'¹⁶¹

What Posèq's article brings to light, whatever his conclusions, is that an attempt to trace the *Magdalene's* emotional content purely in terms of form results in a reductive analysis, all its content being reduced to a single meaning. Rather than concluding that the *Magdalene's* meaning is that of rape, the *Pathosformel* permits uncertainty, open-endedness. The painting is linked to multiply contradictory references, from a dying *Niobid*, to a calmly sleeping *Ariadne*, to a victim of rape. Indeed, even within these identifications, further ambiguity and multiplicity can be found. The *Niobid* (Fig. 39), as with Michelangelo's *Dying Slave* (Fig. 5), is a disturbing figure of neither death nor life, neither pleasure nor pain, but participating in dialogues of both – the uprightness which caused Posèq to discount this figure testifying to a struggle between life and death (she is in fact pulling an arrow out from her back), reinforcing the impression of an indefinable but intense state. The statue of *Ariadne* was misidentified as a *Cleopatra* beginning with its discovery in the sixteenth century, and was only correctly identified in the mid nineteenth-century; thus the narrative associated with the Egyptian queen, and the discourses of sexuality, power, and death in which that figure participates, come visually into play.¹⁶² Abigail Rischin points out that even 'in *Ariadne's* narrative, the image of repose evokes a dynamic sequence of events. *Ariadne's* slumber on the island of Naxos constitutes a transitional moment in her narrative, marking her abandonment by one lover and rescue by another.'¹⁶³

Other scholars bypass darker meanings. For John Gash, the *Magdalene* is unproblematically sensually erotic: 'Caravaggio showed himself acutely aware of this physical dimension, of the mystical union as something passionately experienced rather than symbolically appropriate.'¹⁶⁴ Gash then issues the caveat that Caravaggio's art should not be considered to be participating in the Renaissance wave of 'penitential pin-up' representations of the *Magdalene*: '...while [Caravaggio] deliberately, and influentially, expressed the parallel between mystical surrender and erotic love, implied by the *Magdalen's* posture and her bared left shoulder, he did not pruriently and inappropriately emphasise her sexuality by uncovering her breasts.'¹⁶⁵ Posèq, on the other hand, takes it for granted that breasts are, in fact, represented: '...leaving a part of her bosom bare'.¹⁶⁶ What is clear is that the artist has departed from the somewhat fleshy and voluptuous norm for *Magdalene* depictions: a corporeal voyeurism is not involved here, although an intellectual one may be.



Fig. 41: Caravaggio, 'St John the Baptist', 1603-04, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome



Fig. 42: Caravaggio, 'St. John the Baptist', c. 1604, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City

For Mieke Bal, the physiology of the figure and the lack of full breasts could be less attributed to modesty than to a darkly erotic pre-masculine bodiliness.¹⁶⁷ The emphasis on the neck and shoulder of the Magdalene, as well as the composition, colouring and ascetic quality of the work recalls some of Caravaggio's images of young boys as St. John the Baptist (such as Fig. 41 and Fig. 42), painted at the same period in the artist's career.¹⁶⁸ Anterior by a couple of years to the *Magdalene*, these renderings of darkly preoccupied young men, their eyes hidden in shadow, are difficult to interpret; part philosophical reflection, part arrogant moodiness, part angry resentment. They suggest that Caravaggio was establishing a schema for the depiction of troubled or profound thought, which was to culminate in the pared down mental intensity of the *Magdalene*.

Posèq uses the work of Warburg in the style of classic connoisseurship, to isolate and identify *the* past source which will 'explain' the painting. Discounting the *Niobids* on purely formal grounds, for instance, does not do justice to *Pathosformel* as a concept in the sense understood by Bal, of a 'miniature theory'. It can provide a model, not only for images which physically resemble each other but for images which seem to comprise many different discursive positions: pain; death; pleasure; violation; sleep; fainting; but where the power of something incredibly intense and indefinable, the essence of what 'ecstasy' seems to be, possesses the protagonist. Across these representations, seeming unconsciousness collides with intense mental presence: the problem of how to frame such a visual archive remains.

Aby Warburg wrote in his journal,

Sometimes it looks to me as if, in my role as psycho-historian, I tried to diagnose the schizophrenia of Western civilization from its images in an autobiographical reflex. The ecstatic 'Nympha' (maniac) on the one side and the mourning river-god (depressive) on the other.¹⁶⁹

Warburg's perception of his *Pathosformel* enables not merely the transmission of formal characteristics across chronological time. On the contrary, the upsurge of energy contained within the *Pathosformel* is rather a site of emotional intensity than a calm succession of classical gestures. Within concepts such as the *Pathosformel* reside a revolutionary form of work with images, contrary to how this work has sometimes been interpreted and used, as Margaret Iversen argues,

My claim is that Warburg's approach anticipates in many ways feminist critiques of science and phallogocentric logic. Although the polarities associated with that logic – mind/body, reason/sense experience, logos/pathos and so on – structure his work, they tend to lose any strict hierarchical ordering and become dynamic, dialectical polarities. In sharp contrast, the project of his illustrious 'follower' Erwin Panofsky seems to have been to re-instate the original fixity of these oppositions. The same can be said of his biographer Ernst Gombrich, formerly director of the Warburg Institute in London. In their hands Warburg is deproblematized, becalmed, and his complex and conflicted theory of art turned into an unambiguous affirmation of Enlightenment ideals.¹⁷⁰

Like Didi-Huberman, Iversen argued for a reinterpretation of Warburg's work, but unlike Didi-Huberman she sites this reinterpretation as profoundly useful for a feminist methodology which seeks to undermine binary thought structures. Warburg defined these new concepts of how meaning and art function together as the 'iconology of intervals' (*eine Ikonologie des Zwischenraumes*); in other words, 'not objects but the tensions, analogies, contrasts, or contradictions among them.'¹⁷¹ Agamben notes that 'we will be truly faithful to Warburg's teaching if we learn to see the contemplative gaze of the god in the nymph's dancing gesture'.¹⁷² Margaret Iversen's remark about the logic of polarities dynamised in Warburg's work can form an introduction to the rest of this thesis. In the artworks under discussion here, as this discourse of ecstasy begins to be framed, it is only by making fluid the structures for the production of meaning, and being concerned by the 'intervals' between images and meanings, that an approach can be created which opens up the scope of art historical study. Working gradually towards the idea of the representation of bodily thought and an embodied female subjectivity through the representation of ecstasy, a focus on the interval enables both an internalising and an activation of the binary divisions which have immobilised analysis of images of ecstasy. To finish with an inspiration from

Warburg's most fascinating project, the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, I shall propose in the following chapters a montage of images, from different contexts, periods, and media, positioned with and against each other, so that the question is not to identify meaning as such, but to establish a space to enable dynamic interactions and encounters to take place.

Chapter Two: the female body and fetishistic modes of viewing

To frame the set of visual interactions and juxtapositions I will be proposing in this section, I begin by setting them alongside the work of Mieke Bal. An act of 'framing', in the terms of the concept developed by Bal, encourages 'an analytical interpretation that avoids paraphrasis, projection, and paradigmatic confinement, and that opens up a practice of cultural analysis that endorses its function as cultural mediation.'¹

Interacting images: Mieke Bal and a methodology of framing

In *Travelling Concepts*, Mieke Bal presents 'framing' in terms of her larger project of 'consider[ing] the *life of objects* in their *present tense*' or 'foregrounding... the slippery but crucial 'now-time' of art objects' (Bal's italics).² Traditional analysis in terms of 'context' has often had as its sole aim to ascertain the artist's visual, cultural and political environment and influences in order to 'explain' the art object. Analysed in terms of the frames and framing acting upon it, on the other hand, the 'image' is instead itself a participant, for which the term 'history' does not have the limited meaning of reconstruction and explanation. History can instead be seen as encompassing the time which passes between the image and its reception, and the way in which the image and the gaze function within the frame of memory. This larger project of Bal's becomes clearer through an engagement with some of her slightly earlier writings.

In *Quoting Caravaggio* Bal focused on the question of the relationship of contemporary art to Baroque art, shifting in her methodology between two distinct modes of vocabulary. The relationship is at all times seen as fundamentally active. Contemporary art 'intervenes', 'engages with', 'entangles' with the Baroque: it 'reworks', 'recasts', even 'appropriates' or more violently 'obliterates' its seventeenth century counterparts.³

Bal suggests the complex notion of 'shared time', looking at how art from each period plays out 'concerns that are both of today and of then.'⁴ By developing this idea in the Foucauldian terms of discourse analysis, Bal permits an understanding of this apparently straightforward concept which sets out the relationship between the Baroque and contemporary visual preoccupations, while avoiding framing art history in terms of influence and response, source and derivation: 'Such features as the fold... constitute not only baroque motifs but also visual "discourses"'.⁵ A Foucauldian reading discounts

notions of continuity and reconstructing the past, in favour of the analysis of discourses, as Cousins and Hussain summarise:

Historical investigation is no longer part of the great work of reconstruction, it is a question of posing certain questions which exercise the human sciences, of posing them to historical evidence...

and they define historical evidence in terms of 'events'; 'the criterion and form of their status as events is derived not from 'the past' but from the form of analysis which groups them together.'⁶

These transhistorical visual discourses, framed initially by the analyst's participation, are centred around the overarching theoretical model Bal names *quotation*. Bal situates quotation between iconography and intertextuality. Iconography has traditionally tended to see contemporary images as being essentially dictated to by the meanings of certain elements as they had been set in place by older images. In *Louise Bourgeois' Spider* Bal names this approach 'the narrative of anteriority', which she says leads to the attitude that,

...a visual work is thus considered an *illustration* of the narrative that precedes it and to which it is *subordinated*, its success being measured in terms of the degree to which it matches the story. ... [Such an analysis] uses the prior text of images as a measuring stick. (emphasis in the text)⁷

This was until the contribution of Michael Baxandall, who, in a sense, reversed this process by arguing that newer artists 'intervene' actively in the meaning-laden material they are inevitably presented with from the past, thereby problematising the whole issue of historical reconstruction. Intertextuality, for its part, operates through the interchange of signs. A sign, even when borrowed, is seen as coming with textual 'baggage' – Bal describes this as 'visual textuality' – which the new artist necessarily deals with in one way or another, whether it is through outright rejection or acceptance, or via making ironic, fragmenting, reversing, or variously altering the meanings which have accrued to the sign.

In *Quoting Caravaggio* Bal takes the next step to combine both practices of iconography and intertextuality when she argues that 'quotation' allows for a two-way process, a dialogue, between past and present images;

...this study of what Freud would call *Nachträglichkeit* attempts to trace the process of meaning-production over time (in both directions: present/past and past/present) as an open, dynamic process, rather than to map the results of that process.⁸

Bal had addressed the problem of iconography and intertextuality eight years previously in *Reading Rembrandt* where she lays out the case for the importance of being

aware of ‘pre-text’ and ‘co-texts’— what other related texts formed the background of a particular text, and with which others must it now work in conjunction. If an interpretation or an analysis does not take the pre- and co-texts into account, characters and events are stripped of their critical or satirical power. This view of the role of later texts is taken up again in *Quoting Caravaggio* when Bal comments that she sees contemporary art as a form of cultural philosophy, ‘critically engaging’ with what came before.⁹

In *Louise Bourgeois’ Spider* Bal explicitly calls the work of art a ‘theoretical object’ (Bal, 2001:34): ‘Far from being influenced by her visual and artistic environment, the artist ‘discusses’ that environment.’ (Bal, 2001:46). Such an analysis restores the role of chronologically later images from the impression that they merely imitate or passively refer to, say, Baroque motifs. It redresses the balance of seeing an artwork such as Caravaggio’s *Magdalene* as the original or source, an attitude which might otherwise have initially been instigated by framing the two images together.

Although Bal concludes that ‘Meaning is fundamentally unstable’, (Bal, 1991:214) and criticises many aspects of the iconographical approach, nevertheless, she advocates a form of iconography as a way of ‘reading’ images as texts – hence the title *Reading Rembrandt*. For Bal here, iconography is an example of a positive uniting of verbal and visual modes of discourse, as it grants visual art ‘the status of a semiotic system, if not a language’ (Bal, 1991:215). In *Quoting Caravaggio* Bal had mentioned the concept of ‘visual textuality’ as used in intertextuality to refer to the textual baggage accompanying a sign when it is cited. In a move which was partly instigated in the passage from *Reading Rembrandt*, Bal maintains that visual textuality should be seen as a form of discourse, when the new artist reconstitutes something new from the textual debris associated to the sign – for example, ‘Re-using a pose taken from an earlier self-portrait, Rembrandt inserts the discourse of self-portraiture into his *Bellona* from 1633.’ (Bal, 1999a:9)

The potential insertion of multiple discourses into each artwork results, in *Quoting Caravaggio*, in *interdiscursivity*. Interestingly, Bal sees this from a Bakhtinian standpoint not only in terms of thematic subject matter (as would a typical iconographic approach) but also in terms of form, colour, texture, chiaroscuro, perspective; each element itself embodying a ‘discursive position’.¹⁰ As each art object can comprise many different discursive positions, thus, ambiguity and plural meaning legitimately occur within this framework of *quotation* which Bal has established. The artist’s or photographer’s role is to set in motion the production of meaning by interfering in some way with the network of

signs associated with the new image he or she is producing; the image is then free to perform its status as discursive event with all the potential to frame and be framed that that entails.

In this chapter I juxtapose images ranging from antique sculpture, Renaissance painting, late French Impressionism, twentieth century sculpture, eighteenth century then High Baroque sculpture, to contemporary installation art, photography and performance art in an a-chronological framing. Through the space manoeuvred by the Warburgian *interval* read through the methodologies outlined above, I shall investigate the representation of the female body in Western culture in terms of the opposition between the body and the idea of a depicted subjectivity; an opposition upon which a fetishising gaze depends, but which it also produces.

The *Knidian Venus*

Posèq refers to ‘...the expressiveness of the Magdalene, which *haunted* Caravaggio copyists...’¹¹ This allusion to the ghostly nature of the relationship between images and their precedents anticipates a recent study by French art historian Georges Didi-Huberman where he uses the metaphor of ghosts – in French, ‘revenants’ or ‘those who return’ – to illustrate Aby Warburg’s concept of surviving forms or *Nachleben*.¹²

While antique sculptures of Venus do not perhaps immediately suggest themselves as candidates for a passionate Warburgian *Pathosformel*, I want to argue the contrary. I start with *Venus* not from a chronological motivation but to trace a haunting; *Venus* as a body which haunts all representations of the female body, and which acts as a powerful nucleus, surrounded by the discourses of desire of the whole genealogy of Western art.

Venus Pudica is a term generally used to refer to the posture developed in copies and variants of the *Knidian Venus*, a famous ancient Greek statue by Praxiteles, known today only in Roman copies such as Fig. 44 and Fig. 45.¹³ The term *pudica*, deriving from the Latin *pudenda* meaning both *shame* and *genitalia*, ultimately leads back in its duality of meaning to the Greek *aidos* and *aidoios*.¹⁴ It is translated in French as *pudeur*, although the English language reconstitutes a slightly different paradoxical double meaning: modesty and shame.

Nanette Solomon describes the paradigmatic multiplicity established by Praxiteles in the development of this posture, while for her, the posture is unambiguously a response

to sexual threat:

The rest of her body language, such as the slight crouch of her body, the turn of her head to one side and the way she pulls her free leg in to press her legs together firmly, weight a narrative over iconic reading... The most telling gesture, however, is that of the right hand before the pubis. The gesture constructs a sexual narrative of protective fear that is conveyed by her body language as a whole. As she leaves her bath, the goddess hears someone coming and in modesty and fear urgently protects herself. Praxiteles has created a goddess vulnerable in exhibition, whose primary definition is as one who does not wish to be seen. In fact, being seen is here undeniably connected with being violated. Praxiteles has installed in us much more than the controlling male gaze. He has transformed the viewer into a voyeur, a veritable Peeping Tom. We yearn to see that which is withheld. The viewer's shameful desire to see matches the sculpture's 'modest' desire to not be seen.¹⁵

The interpretation of the hand gesture of the *Knidian Venus* has occupied art history for centuries. Solomon states that,

despite her interpretation of the sculpture as providing men with a 'common "natural" and "essentially manly" site of mastery', 'the issue of whether she... points to herself as to her powers of fertility, or whether she is, in fact, covering herself before the eyes of an intruder, can never be resolved.'¹⁶ Andrew Stewart agrees that 'one cannot tell whether she is taking

the garment off or putting it on'.¹⁷ Other art historians have identified other forms of simultaneous contradiction. Nanette Solomon draws attention to the analysis by Wiltrud Neumer-Pfau which looks at the *Knidian Venus* for 'evidence of either nonchalance (relaxation) or adrenalized vigilance (tension).' Solomon declares herself to be in agreement with 'her conclusion that, though both exist, the latter seems to dominate.'¹⁸ Andrew Stewart concludes that it was the contradictions and complexities of the very personality of the goddess Venus in legend which 'in essence challenged the sculptor... to represent the unrepresentable'.¹⁹



Fig. 45: 'Colonna Venus', Roman copy of sculpture by Praxiteles, Museo Pio Clementino, Vatican Museums

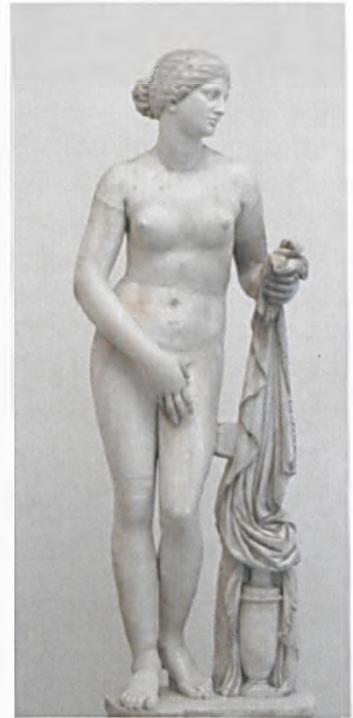


Fig. 44: 'Venus', Roman copy of 'Knidian Venus' by Praxiteles, 4th century BC, Ludovisi Collection (arms and drapery restored 16th century)

Stewart goes further, however, and proposes a final paradox in the *Knidian Venus*: an alternative interpretation of the discourses of

power and sexuality in operation. He summarises:

Against Bernoulli's opinion that the *Knidia* et al. explore the theme of female embarrassment before the male gaze, Havelock argues that they manifest the power of female sexuality and "symbolize the mythical generosity and humanity of womankind" (p. 144). In my view, both contentions are true (though I would phrase hers differently), and this contradiction underwrites the entire genre. In a patriarchal society where all looking is predicated as male, a sovereign female subjectivity, or some semblance of it, can only be constructed by placating the gaze – the public eye – and subverting the individual, libidinous glance. The Praxitelean strategies of averting Aphrodite's head yet making her smile, shielding her body (but none too efficiently), and actually omitting her vulva (which Havelock, amazingly, ignores), are aimed precisely at bridging this dichotomy.²⁰

Starting in this extract with the tension between public and private gaze, Stewart's argument is based on the perception, also noted by Sue Blundell, that the goddess is reacting to an intruder coming in to her left, leaving the position of the viewer/voyeur directly in front of the statue unobserved and unhindered.²¹ However, Stewart adds another level of interpretation to this scenario in order to argue for the sexual autonomy of the *Venus*.

And because Praxiteles... omits the goddess's genitals and so conceals/seals the ultimate concavity, at the statue's center we find an enigma. So Praxiteles was the first Western sculptor to get beyond the supposition that the (male) spectator necessarily plays active subject to the female body's passive object, which is simply taken over and possessed by his desire... Using Aphrodite to demonstrate the awesome power of female sexuality, he demonstrates that a simple phallogocentric paradigm ordered around the notion of female lack is both inadequate and psychologically untenable. Instead, he folds her supposed lack into the (male) spectator's. She avoids/voids his 'cocksure' phallogocentrism by affecting to ignore it for another's; and since he cannot completely possess her, his ocular gropings turn into physical frustration. The all-powerful goddess offers him no closure, no safe haven for his desire. Instead, she makes him but one member of a putative love triangle, holding him in her grip like putty, able at her whim either to turn, smile, and bestow unimaginable bliss on either him or his rival, or avenge their trespass with devastating effect. So, paradoxically, a bodily display that for two centuries had been unthinkable in monumental sculpture outside acts of violence against women... still shocks us, yet no longer merely reconfirms female subservience but actively suggests its opposite. It turns passivity and receptiveness into a source of power and choice.²²

In this fantasised 'threesome', Stewart claims to locate female sexual power in the ability not only to bestow or withdraw sexual pleasure from a desiring male, but also in the potential to wound or punish that male. Sharing this perception, Kenneth Lapatin describes the *Knidian Venus* as 'sexually more aggressive than later variants such as the Capitoline Venus' (Fig. 48).²³ Stewart points out that in the legend relating to the goddess, 'even if she

initiated the encounter, for a man to see her naked normally brought lifelong impotence, and if she did not initiate it, the result was instant and terrible retribution.²⁴

The *Venus* is participating in a more and more complex sexual scenario in order to gain her supposed sexual autonomy in Stewart's eyes; she is placed into the role of the woman who refuses, punishes and titillates the desiring viewer, who masochistically takes pleasure in the manipulation.

Nanette Solomon's critique of the *Venus* is based on its participation in dominant visual ideologies of female passivity. She cites the example of a very early sculptural response to Praxiteles' sculpture, Fig. 46, which selectively picks up on the vulnerability and fear, and subsequent titillation, inherent in the original. Solomon's analysis does not fall into the trap of

Stewart's, to fantasise the real woman's response to a sexual scenario. Instead, she speaks of the sculptor manipulating his audience by making them desire the genital area, by hiding it from view: 'Praxiteles makes her pubis the most desirable thing to see/have; the unjaded viewer *cannot not* think about her pubis while standing before her.'²⁵ She goes on to describe Praxiteles' 'brilliant ambiguity' in the achievement of this paradoxical gesture, both concealing and revealing the female body.²⁶ Solomon's main point, however, is an ideological one: that despite the brilliance which endows the *Venus* with such a compelling presence that the effects are still felt in art thousands of years later, the sculpture is 'a successful form of culturally produced ideological artifice. It is taken from the Greeks and Romans for the work it does in defining the female nude as essentially sexual and, on that account, in a state of perpetual fear and vulnerability.'²⁷

Another significant aspect to note about Andrew Stewart's argument about the *Knidian Venus* is that it locates the power of female sexuality in the closedness of the vagina. Pointing out that the details of the *Venus's* genital anatomy behind her shielding hand are not represented, merely smoothed out to nothingness where one might expect to find labia, Stewart locates in this fact a tantalising and erotically frustrating challenge to the male voyeur. With his gaze, the masculine desiring viewer partakes of her whole body in



Fig. 46: 'Aphrodite', bronze, c. 150-100 BCE, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

terms of alternate concavity and convexity, framed in terms of fullness and emptiness. Here Stewart refers to the general curve of her body:

...the concavity it creates is but a void waiting to be filled: here it suggests that Aphrodite has registered the impact of my desiring glance, and is surreptitiously beckoning me in.... hint[ing] that [her body] is undulating in reaction to my ocular caresses.²⁸

The somewhat disturbing *mise-en-scène* here, exacerbated by the account in the first person, is echoed in the way Stewart insistently frames the statue's body in terms of 'open' and 'closed'.

Her 'closed' right side with its vertical limbs, convex curves, and taut contours anchors her body in space and repels the eye, while her left side's flexed limbs, concave curves, and broken contours beckon it in – even as she draws her cloak forward to cover herself.²⁹

Simultaneously refusing and welcoming her admirer's attentions, the idea of the woman refusing the desiring male gaze, without the desire to titillate further, does not seem to occur to Stewart. The Venus is consistently constructed as sexually provocative, the subjectivity with which this argument endows her remaining at the service of masculine desire alone.

What is more concerning about Stewart's argument is that the desire of the male viewer is heightened by the fact that the depicted woman has no visible sexual organs: the front visible aspect of her genitals, shielded by the hand, are not modelled in marble, indeed the area is smoothed to nothingness, or sealed. Despite the eroticism Stewart locates in the sculpture's 'openness' and 'beckoning', and that he sees her as a 'void waiting to be filled', ultimately in his words, the 'awesome power of female sexuality' resides in the fact that, 'because Praxiteles... omits the goddess's genitals and so conceals/seals the ultimate concavity, at the statue's center we find an enigma.'³⁰

Impenetrable beauty, internal horror: fetishism and the female nude

Georges Didi-Huberman cites Botticelli's 'Birth of Venus' as being a cold and impassive nude, associating the desirability of the sculpture precisely with her closedness: 'sealed, as impenetrable as she is beautiful.'³¹ In *The Female Nude*, a book not cited by Didi-Huberman in his book *Ouvrir Vénus*, about 'nudity, dream and cruelty', Lynda Nead offered a feminist reading of the iconic 'sealed, impenetrable' nude.³² She demonstrates



Fig. 47: Sandro Botticelli, 'The Birth of Venus' (detail), c. 1485, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence

how the idealisation of the nude female body in Western art arose precisely because of its construction as impenetrable. The surface of the nude body acts as a barrier between inside and outside. Any transgression of the margins of the body, perhaps first indicated by Mary Douglas in her seminal book *Purity and Danger*, is seen as profoundly threatening.³³

The threat represented by the interior of in particular the female body has, in Laura Mulvey's words, 'haunted representations of femininity through the ages, not consistently manifest, but persisting as an intermittent strand of patriarchal mythology and misogyny.'³⁴ Nowhere is the inside of the female body construed as more disturbing than in the misogynistic texts of the early Church fathers. There we find a recurring theme of the horrific nature of the female body, and in particular a strong and strangely angry revulsion at the thought of the treacherously beautiful exterior, a semblance of purity, hiding the horrors dissembled under the skin. I cite here only St. John Chrysostom:

The whole of her body is nothing less than phlegm, blood, bile, rheum and the fluid of digested food ... If you consider what is stored up behind those lovely eyes, the angle of the nose, the mouth and the cheeks you will agree that the well-proportioned body is only a whitened sepulchre.³⁵

Similar texts can be traced up to late medieval times.³⁶ The female body constructed in that discourse precisely in terms of the horror of the inside is also mentioned by Freud, where he anatomises the fear of castration, informing in turn the mechanism of fetishism. As Laura Mulvey summarises, 'Masculine desire is caught in an oscillation between erotic obsession with the female body and fear of the castration that it signifies. It is, of course, the fear of castration, and subsequent disavowal of the woman's body as castrated, that Freud saw as the cause of male fetishism.'³⁷ If erotic desire of women is not enabled by the resolved Oedipus complex, then the defence mechanism of fetishism comes into play, where the object of desire is displaced, away from the woman's body or genitals, onto an object or item of clothing for example. In misogynistic early Christian writings neither

mechanism seems to operate in a context where women are not valued as objects of desire, and this deeply-felt fear is dramatically unveiled in these texts.

A Freudian psychoanalytical approach forms the theoretical basis for the book *Ouvrir Vénus*.³⁸ Referring to Kenneth Clark's famous separation of 'nude' and 'naked', Didi-Huberman argues that this separation or distancing, and associated idealisation, of the female nude in art history is a form of obsessional neurosis which operates a defence mechanism against the sexual desirability of these nudes, and in particular against a desire tinged by the fear of a nudity which is by definition threatening, according to the author, because nudity suggests and leads towards the horror of the body's insides and internal organs.³⁹ He bases his argument around a dense text of Freud's from 1926, 'Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety', which focuses on forms of defence, of which Didi-Huberman uses *isolation*.⁴⁰ He is interested in isolation because of how the touch taboo functions. Because the act of touching incorporates simultaneously the possibility of physical aggression and of erotic pleasure, it contains the paradoxical 'oscillation' between erotic desire and fear, which, as mentioned by Mulvey, characterises the visual economy of the female nude in art. Touching could be equally a caress or an attack, just as opening (the larger concern of Didi-Huberman's book) could equally be a liberation or a wound. Referring to both Aby Warburg and Walter Benjamin, Didi-Huberman argues that images of nudes are a 'halted dialectic', or '*dialectique à l'arrêt*', a status quo of disparate and balanced tensions: nudity is fundamentally 'impure'.⁴¹

Although intended to track the operation of the 'isolation' defence mechanism and to thereby explain the unnameable threat the sealed nudes conveys, Didi-Huberman's analysis opens for me quite another can of worms about the operation of fetishism in art history. In his model, interior and exterior are stringently kept separate. He writes, 'Organic images would thus be... double sided'.⁴² What is more, the interior is invariably characterised in terms of violence and horror – 'To open a body is surely to disfigure it, to destroy all its harmony'⁴³ just as *all* nudity is seen as mortally dangerous - he writes, 'it is impossible to isolate or to be unaware of the mortal unease which is created by any nudity of the flesh,'⁴⁴ but the nature of the universality of this danger is not further investigated.

The threat posed by the unified, sealed nudity of a female body for Didi-Huberman, is perhaps that as defined by Freud; the threat of castration. Didi-Huberman's text reinforces rather than breaks down the binary split between inside and outside, which itself operates the fetishism defence, and defends the male child against the horror of the primal

scene, but which, at the same time, problematises depictions of the female body throughout the whole of society as well as in art history. For Lynda Nead, fetishism creates 'an aesthetic that has structured the representation of the female body in western art since antiquity...'⁴⁵ and she argues that as a result,

...one of the principal goals of the female nude [in art] has been the containment and regulation of the female sexual body. The forms, conventions and poses of art have worked metaphorically to shore up the female body – to seal orifices and to prevent marginal matter from transgressing the boundary dividing the inside of the body and the outside, the self from the space of the other.⁴⁶

Many of the central concerns of Nead's seminal 1992 book *The Female Nude*, from which this extract is taken, arise out of Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*,⁴⁷ the English translation of which appeared ten years earlier. In it, Kristeva develops the concept of the 'abject', primarily a psychoanalytical concept, but a concept which also has consequences in a semiotic sense for the functioning of power systems in society. Kelly Oliver defines the abject as follows:

[Kristeva] maintains that the abject corresponds to the attempt to clearly delineate borders. In order to delineate borders, a line must be drawn between the inside and the outside, between the clean and proper self and the abject other. That which threatens identity must be jettisoned from the borders and placed outside. In this sense, identity is constituted through a process of abjection.⁴⁸

Lynda Nead returns to this idea to explain why the female nudes in art history are perfect, sealed, idealised;

What seems to be at stake... is the production of a rational, coherent subject. In other words, the notion of unified form is integrally bound up with the perception of self, and the construction of individual identity.⁴⁹

Venus and absence

In her work on the *Knidian Venus*, Nanette Solomon remarks that when the narrative force of ambiguity in the original sculpture is not present, as in the later interpretations of the work such as the *Capitoline Venus*, Fig. 48, the result is an insidious passivity which is then transmitted, in the generalisation of the posture, to become a visual attribute of women in general.

Aside from covering their pubis and breasts, these figures express neither pride in the source of their fertility nor same for their exposed sexual organs. In fact, a peculiar feeling of vacuousness characterizes the representation of women in these works. This form of dissimulation results in the disenfranchised gesture/pose which can then only be understood as some sort of deep and enduring attribute of women in general rather than a momentary reaction to a specific situation.⁵⁰

She also returns to this argument in reference this time to Botticelli's *Venus* (Fig. 47):

The... images share a vacuous, unknowing look. They gesture as if in a trance or through some agency outside their own volition. Again, the gesture is divorced from a narrative reading of a particular figure or moment and thus free to work as an essentialist definition of woman in general through this all-telling attribute.⁵¹

The female nude in art is constructed here as a shell, a hollow surface. The female 'protagonist' of the painting is projected as mentally absent, although her body is present to be looked at. The idea of the female body being an empty shell or case, a passive surface, brings us back to the concept of modesty/shame or *pudeur*. An action which is *pudique* hides the skin, but when the skin itself is just a surface, *pudeur* and *impudeur* become irrelevant. Georges Didi-Huberman finds himself troubled by the psychological distance of Botticelli's *Venus* – feeling that erotic interaction is barred by her mental absence, he finds the pleasure of looking to be prevented and diverted by the very nudity which he feels should be at its core. He writes, 'Her form of pensive solitude distances her from us as from her own sexual existence.'⁵²

It is Venus's mental absence, therefore, which for Didi-Huberman disables any relation of scopic pleasure between her and the viewer. He assumes that it is the viewer's right to be offered the sight of the nude as an erotic pleasure, and like Andrew Stewart commenting on the *Knidian Venus*, assumes that if a female nude is attributed subjectivity it is in order to participate in an erotic gaze network, and to respond to a desiring gaze.

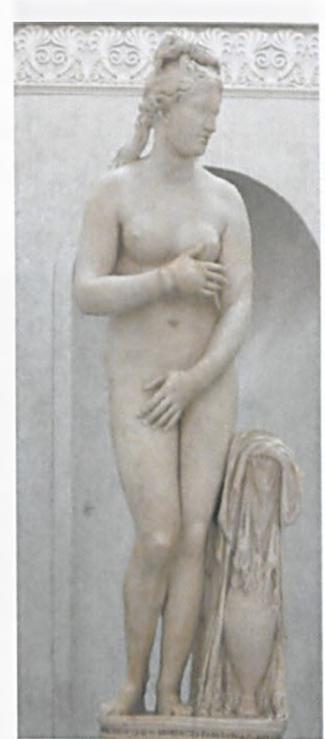


Fig. 48: 'Capitoline Venus', Antonine copy of late Hellenistic sculpture, Palazzo Nuovo, Capitoline Museums, Rome



Fig. 49 – Detail of Venus, see ref. Fig. 47

Pudeur and intersubjectivity

Through her use of the work of Jacques Lacan, José Morel Cinq-Mars has shown how it is in fact *pudeur* which creates an intersubjective relationship. She notes that *pudeur* 'transforms the relationship between the viewed and the viewer: from an objectifying relationship it becomes one of intersubjectivity.'⁵³ Psychoanalyst and neurologist Boris Cyrulnik understands this instinctively in his comment on Renoir's *La Dormeuse* (Fig. 50):

As long as she does not open her eyes, I can look at her to my heart's content. Asleep, unconscious, she does not know that she is being observed: I do not feel any unease. But if, by misfortune, she should open her eyes, her gaze meeting mine will make me understand instantly that, in her world, I am a voyeur. Then I would feel ashamed.⁵⁴

For Cyrulnik, the crucial factor of intersubjectivity is whether the eyes are open or closed.

This is the site of the invisible line between attributing awareness to the depicted body, and negating that body's subjectivity completely, as he does when looking at the body quite freely. It is only when he imagines her knowing she is observed, that the relation between them changes. Indeed for Cyrulnik it is perhaps paradoxically only in this moment of intersubjectivity that voyeurism can exist. He continues,

The sentiment of shame can only arise in a psyche capable of conceiving of another person's mental realm. Outside of this ability, emotions are expressed without inhibition, spontaneously, with neither *pudeur* nor *impudeur*.⁵⁵

It is not only left up to the psyche of the observer to be capable of representing the mental world of another person or not. Renoir's erotic nude will not open her eyes, because she is a body with its interior denied – her easy nakedness is just a surface to gaze upon, her inattention to the viewer's gaze carefully poised by the artist on the threshold of awakening, in order to produce precisely the form of titillating potentiality which fascinates Cyrulnik – he might get caught. What is disturbing about Cyrulnik's observations, those of yet another male academic responding to an image of a nude female, is that he feels quite confident and feels no 'unease' in visually consuming the depicted body of an unconscious, non-consenting woman. The fantasy of the voyeur depends on the woman's awareness of being



Fig. 50: Pierre-Auguste Renoir, 'La Dormeuse', 1897, Sammlung Oskar Reinhart, Winterthur, Switzerland

objectified. Responses to visual representations of women, ubiquitous through not only art but in parallel discourses such as advertising, cinema, and television, structure the scopic relationship between the sexes in all areas of culture.

Mary Garrard focuses on the partly-opened eyes of Artemisia Gentileschi's *Cleopatra* (Fig. 126) to suggest a depiction of subjectivity.⁵⁶ Griselda Pollock develops this idea:

At first glance, the eyes appear closed as if death has already overtaken the queen. Closer examination reveals them to be still a little open, and this detail dramatically alters the whole image. A somnolent probably just dead body is one in which the subject is temporarily – or permanently – absent. The unconsciousness of sleep or recent death makes the image read as a body – the body of woman can be contemplated when thus dead or asleep ...All these signs compound that almost overlooked but crucial detail, namely her continuing consciousness which firmly locates a subjective presence inside the body. The body becomes not merely its site but its articulation. Veiled by the drooping eyelids, yet once encountered, that momentary sign of consciousness polices any purely scopic relation to the body, making the body a site of being.⁵⁷

Pollock's observation confirms what Boris Cyrulnik experienced with regard to Renoir's *Dormeuse* – that the viewer can take his fill of looking at an unconscious body, but the mental presence of the viewed other can interfere to prevent this. Through the signs that Pollock cites, rather than a horrific, abject physical interior, a mental interior is intimated which in itself sets in motion, for a certain kind of desiring viewer such as Cyrulnik, notions of shame and voyeurism.⁵⁸ This ultimate work of layering in portrayals of human subjects allows a space for *pudeur* and *impudeur* to operate. These concepts themselves, in turn impart agency to the body which was previously the mere object of a gaze.

A process of opening

Didi-Huberman sees the history of Western art as a separation of desire from judgement, a process of self-denial which leads to theorising philosophy and meaning around the nude as a defence against its erotic potential:

To finally separate the nude from its own nudity, it was easy to amuse oneself by dressing it up in a third layer of clothing: ...a garment of ideas... A way of insisting, once more, that the nude should not be viewed directly, frontally offered, but rather from an angle, by a detour. In fact, it is a question of placing a screen: that the nude's symbolism could take precedence over the phenomenology of its nudity.⁵⁹

Didi-Huberman concludes that the emphasis on philosophical interpretation and layers of meaning has the result that 'we have made the nude itself into the clothing, the garment, the holding-site [*tenant-lieu*] of something else: garment of... ideal beauty, of mythological stories...'.⁶⁰ This rejection of the physical erotic properties of nudity is what leads Didi-Huberman to his argument based on Freud's *isolation*, as mentioned above.

If nudity is a garment, then what does Didi-Huberman mean by the 'something else' which it clothes? In *Ouvrir Vénus* he goes on to deconstruct the image of the sealed nude body by studying the fine line between *pudor* and *horror* in darkly Bataillean terms. Georges Bataille viewed nudity not as a state but as a process, a slippage towards a horrific 'opening' of the chaotic interior of the body. He saw scopophilic erotic pleasure as being centred in the increasingly intense desire to defile and corrupt, the more perfectly beautiful the nude body was considered to be.⁶¹ Didi-Huberman follows this trace to its most extreme conclusions in the imagery of Georges Bataille and the Marquis de Sade: describing his procedure almost in terms of a compulsion: 'Everything commands us to follow this logic all the way to the end of this process of opening which the image of nudity calls upon itself, stirs up against itself.'⁶²

The literal violation, with indescribable horror, of the very deepest parts of the female body is for Didi-Huberman the disturbing but inevitable conclusion of a process which began with the frustration caused by the sealed, closed off nudity of Botticelli's *Venus*.

Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff traces a similar structure in medieval writings on women, in her study of violent misogynistic fabliaux. She writes,

A beautiful woman, one who creates desire, must be unmasked... the presence of unmasking patterns... indicates a deep structure of mistrust of female ambiguity in medieval and Renaissance culture.⁶³

Didi-Huberman's study does not start at the beginning of the trajectory – to extrapolate in the other direction, he disregards the layers which cover the nude body: generally described in art as *drapery*.

Inside-out: drapery and subjectivity

José Morel Cinq-Mars's interpretation of the role of the veil in *Quand la pudeur prend corps* both supports and challenges Didi-Huberman's frustration with the nude in

terms of an eroticism based on interaction. Referring to the nascent *pudeur* of a child, she explains that once aware of an adult logic of desire,

...the child can no longer exhibit him or herself innocently: the sexualisation of the gaze will have transformed the act of showing the body into a display for the gaze, in that what is seen will always be different from that which is shown: there will always be, from now on, a 'beyond' and a 'lack' compared with that which the eye will see.⁶⁴

Cinq-Mars argues that this complex relationship between the reception of the gaze onto the body and the bodily perception of self, which for Sartre can only result in complete objectification of the one being gazed at, is mediated by the action of *pudeur*. 'Because it summons desire, *pudeur* effectively transforms the relationship between the viewed and the viewer: from an objectifying relationship it becomes one of intersubjectivity.'⁶⁵ Here, far from falling away from a passive, empty body, through *pudeur*, fabric itself becomes the site of agency of the viewed subject. Like Aby Warburg's concept of the 'bewegte Beiwerke', often translated as 'moving accessories', the drama and movement of fabric itself acts as a site of memory, containing a travelling subjectivity. The siting of subjectivity in fabric is suggested by the virtuoso example of sculpted fabric in Bernini's *Teresa* (Fig. 1). The remarkable folds of *Teresa*'s robe paradoxically both cover all her skin except for her face, hands and feet, and also exaggeratedly display a fantasised body, the dark crevices of deeply incised marble evoking the intimate surfaces of the female body.

In one convincing argument to try to explain the work, Giovanni Careri attributes to the extraordinary folds of the *Ludovica* an independent signifying power. Calling the sculpted folds a 'surface for the inscription of pathos', Careri continues, '...Bernini has created, on top of / beyond Ludovica's body, a "performing" body (or a body on display), composed of a "real body" and an "imaginary body" in the throes of spiritual passion.'⁶⁶

While the folds, in their excess, therefore signify and over-signify the female sex, *Ludovica*'s drapery also paradoxically negates



Fig. 51 – see ref. Fig. 1

the physical body. The interior experience of the saint's encounter with her God, undecidedly oscillating between the deeply sacred and the deeply erotic, is dramatically exteriorised in an extraordinary ecstasy of marble, beyond, 'au-dessus', any possible 'real' body.



Fig. 52 – see ref. Fig. 3

In the chapter entitled 'Beckoning Bernini' from *Louise Bourgeois' Spider*, Mieke Bal sees the *Teresa* sculpture group very much in terms of fire, that the *Teresa's* body is a burning flame. This metaphor permeates her text and also colours the particular characterisation of the sculpture which sparked off my inquiry in this paper. Bal writes that '...her body's inside cannot be distinguished from its outside...', also that,

...the ecstasy is due to, or rather consists of, literal ec-stasy: the propagation of the fire of love from inside out, so that *Teresa's* skin, that outer limit of the body, partakes of it; hence, her body's limits are themselves no longer limits... Her whole body becomes a flame: each part of it, of its cover, its surface but beneath which nothing else remains, becomes a flame; fire comes to overrule previous shapes.⁶⁷

In a sense, Bal is saying that *Teresa* is already inside-out, or that such a concept has no relevance for a sculpture consumed with flame, inside which nothing remains. When Bal moves on to discuss one of Louise Bourgeois' sculptures, the *Homage to Bernini* from 1967, she writes that '...this work turns Bernini's painterly surfaces inside-out.'⁶⁸

I wish to further problematise and question the consequences of this almost throwaway phrase of Bal's, so suggestive and problematic for not only the nature of sculpture, but also about the nature of body and spirit, the experience of the sacred, and of the body, sexuality, and femininity. Bourgeois and Bernini are here thrown together into a conceptual space formed by the specific physicality of their sculpture, but which also pulls together debates and discourses of visibility in general; an indescribable, sacred space, where their encounter across the centuries has the potential to interrogate and realign visual discourses of the female body throughout Western art history.

Bal presents the *Teresa* sculpture as Bernini's masterpiece of layering. Her conception of the interior of the sculpture as a 'surface but beneath which nothing else remains' – is, however, problematic. What troubles me about this metaphor is the void at its centre. When this body is inside out, for Bal it is demystified; the saint's experience is



Fig. 53: Louise Bourgeois, 'Homage to Bernini', 1967, Cheim & Read, New York

known completely because *nothing else remains*. In fact, it seems to me that Bernini attempts to represent Teresa of Avila's entirely 'interior' experience of ecstasy but, in doing so, negates and transfigures her actual body so that only a fetishistically excessive 'outside' remains. It is visualised and at the same time neutralised.

Fabric tantalises because it incites in the viewer the desire to reveal, the longing to see what is hidden, to penetrate, yet it refuses to allow visual access. The existence of a 'covering', even one which is depicted in painting or sculpture and therefore can hide no 'real' body in any real sense, provokes an irresistible desire to penetrate into the fantasised interior, turning the body into a site of fantasy.

Philippe Comar shows how for Rousseau, cloth had the role of unleashing the viewer's imagination. Rousseau imagines a statue completely veiled in a thick cloth: 'The imagination of its worshippers painted it for them according to their characters and their passions, and each one... only placed under that mysterious veil the idol of their heart.'⁶⁹

Comar paradoxically describes these viewers as 'blinded by that which they do not see'.⁷⁰ The visual power of what is not seen is much more erotic than that which *is* seen: just as Andrew Stewart found the obstructed genitals of the *Knidian Venus* an erotically fascinating mystery. In typically paradoxical phrasing, Lacan says:

It is through the existence of clothing that the object materialises. Even when the real object is there, it is necessary to imagine that it might not be there, and that it is always possible that one thinks that it is there, precisely where it is not.⁷¹

Corradini and sculptural drapery

In Corradini's famous sculpture 'Modesty' (Fig. 54, also sometimes called 'Chastity'), the fictive marble fabric, conceived so thinly as to cling to every dip and curve of the body of the female allegory represented, operates a disturbingly deathly eroticism. The fabric provides here a 'detour' of marble, like that which Didi-Huberman bemoaned in the stark emptiness of the philosophised *Venus* of Botticelli. Here, however, the detour is an ironic construction, exposing the hypocrisy of the 'modest' nude as seen by such analysts as Andrew Stewart: here a supposed figure of modesty exuberantly displays her body from

underneath its transparent covering. As Mira Schor drily comments in another context, ‘a wet T-shirt clinging to breasts is the same old thing, whether you call it *draperie mouillée*



Fig. 54: Antonio Corradini, ‘Modesty (or Chastity)’, 1749-52, Santa Maria della Pietà dei Sangro, Naples

or tits and ass’.⁷² Beside the erotic connotations, however, there is a great sense of oppression in this sculpture. The marble weight of the drapery drags down upon the body and arms, and stretches back from the forward thrust of the breasts like sticky strands of heavy plaster. Fabric seems to pour across the figure’s face, rendered unbreathing and unseeing. Both the illusion of bodily flesh, and the reality of the materiality of marble, are simultaneously negated and reinforced by this fictive ‘layer’ which acts as a paradoxical invitation and rebuttal of the gaze. The body is both accessible and inaccessible.

The sculpture does indeed reference death – the chapel was commissioned by Raimondo de Sangro to commemorate his late mother, who had died aged twenty when he was an infant. In its combination of both incitement to and refusal of touch, perhaps something of the corporeal tragedy of an infant’s bodily mourning of the mother remains.⁷³

Below the sculpture, a marble relief represents the *Noli me Tangere* scene from the gospel of John: the scene where Mary Magdalene recognises the resurrected Christ in the garden, and he tells her not to touch (or hold on to) him. The evocation of the Magdalene in this context reinforces the impression that the structure of the chapel is based on discourses of bodiliness, presence, and absence. The resurrected Christ’s injunction to the Magdalene, suggesting that their tactile relationship cannot continue as before, has been interpreted throughout the history of art in terms of the power of the longing for touch. As I argued in Chapter One, the Magdalene in the history of Western art is uniquely positioned to



Fig. 55 – Detail, see ref. Fig. 54

possession of death, while simultaneously symbolising the repression of sexual desire.

Other sculptures by Corradini display similarly problematic relationships between drapery and the female body. The *Donna Velata*, in the Louvre (Fig. 56), is another example. Frequently assumed to represent a personification of Faith, this sculpture's unseeing face is a particularly unsettling element. The garment here appears more contrived than that of *Modesty*, with bows and ties manipulating its interaction with the fictive body carved beneath. Here, however, unlike the monolithic and majestic *Modesty*, the figure is humbler, calm, serene and static beneath her marble covering. One breast and arm remain bare, passively positioned at her side. With the

encapsulate discourses of bodily and spiritual forms of touch, starting in her identification with the physical body of Christ, and continuing in her own ecstasy, the paradoxically physical nature of which was a form of continuation of the bodily spirituality and spiritual bodiliness concentrated in her visual representation. Here the Magdalene is symbolically positioned in the role of the viewer, longing to touch but forbidden to access a body which is, nevertheless, gloriously displayed just before her. With gender roles reversed, the body of the figure of *Modesty* becomes a signifier of a Christ-like defiance and



Fig. 56: Antonio Corradini, 'Donna Velata (Veiled Woman)', mid 18th century, Louvre, Paris

other, draped arm in an ambiguous gesture, she raises a section of fabric, seemingly in that movement displacing and bunching the fabric between her legs.

An example of the continuation of elements of baroque visuality well into the eighteenth century, this form of draped figure was popular at this time. The specific excess of drapery in this case particularly recalls Bernini's *Ludovica* (Fig. 57), carved two centuries previously. For Mieke Bal, the folds of the garment coming up in-between Ludovica's legs, by physically raising her body, site her at the heart of a bodily discourse of ecstasy where it is the body which engages fully and literally with the spiritual experience.



Fig. 57 – see ref. Fig. 3

But that extended fold ends just where it becomes a bit too iconic of the slit it is allegedly covering. This fold is absorbed, elevated... in a series of short but firmly erect folds that pull the holy woman up, body and soul.... Ludovica, whose marble body bending backwards resists a too-easy consummation, insists on her body's bodiliness. To the extent her head resists elevation, it proclaims that her body, qua body – sexed female – be accepted in the transformation. Like Christ himself, she will ascend whole, in the *aufheben* materiality of flesh beyond corruption.⁷⁴

Unlike *Ludovica's* spasmodic gesture of pressing her hand to her breast, suggesting intense and sudden physical emotion, the action of the *Donna Velata's* hand calmly yet forcefully tugs the material – so forcefully, indeed, that it seems to begin to cut into the flesh of her left thigh – yet ineffectually, giving a strange sense of movement in stasis. Unlike the fabric in the *Ludovica*, which is itself the agent of bodily movement and which Bal depicts as one with the body, the pulled fabric in the *Donna Velata* even seems to hinder the forward step of the left leg. It is a gesture which neither reveals nor covers. What it achieves is a sense of the inexorable weight and wetness of the marble drapery. The interactions of these parts of fabrics, unlike that of Bernini's *Ludovica* or *Teresa*, draw

attention to the separation between body and fabric, the woman depicted trapped beneath her coverings – yet there is no struggle for escape. Her blind gaze is neither unconscious nor ecstatic but a rather horrifying sense of passive, powerless yet monolithic presence.

Where Bal sees the body indexed in the *Ludovica's* drapery folds, she contrasts both *Ludovica* and *Teresa* with Bernini's earlier *Daphne and Apollo* (Fig. 59), where the sculpture depicts the nymph in the early stages of being transformed into a tree to escape from being raped by Apollo, in accordance with the story in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*:

Daphne, taken from a pagan story transformed by this Christian sculptor, was still subject to a division between inner body and outer layer, so that her transformation confined her to the fragmentation to which a subject remains condemned when exteriority and interiority are divided.⁷⁵



Fig. 58: detail, see ref. Fig. 56



Fig. 59 – see ref. Fig. 9



Fig. 60: Detail, see ref. Fig. 9

Here yet another form of sculptural veiling is in play. The tree bark growing up Daphne's body is a layer, a surface, shielding her body and between her legs just in time, as Apollo surges forward from behind to grip her body. The sculpted marble seems to grow

and cover the soft skin which the sculptor so dramatically contrasts with the rough bark. Here layers remain separate; Daphne's body is not so much transformed as veiled, hidden forever. As such she remains a fragmented subject, her body unable to resolve its paradox of partial transformation.

For Bal, the *Daphne*, *Teresa* and *Ludovica* formed three stages of Bernini's exploration of layering. In terms of phallic visuality, Corradini's *Donna Velata* represents, not a further step along that trajectory but a regression. The hyperbolic layering evokes an oppressive eroticism reinforcing conceptions of the female body as a sealed yet penetratable entity, where the phallic viewing pleasure consists in being tantalised by the possibility of opening. The face, that most expressive of bodily elements where emotion and subjectivity can be read, is even itself veiled – once all orifices sealed, no sense of identity need trouble the fetishistic fantasy of femininity.

The Fold: architecturality and surface

An interesting element of *Powers of Horror* is the way Kristeva visualises abjection in architectural terms, with the body's limits described as a 'fortified castle'.⁷⁶ St. Teresa of Avila entitled one of her most important works *The Interior Castle*; Teresa was another theorist who was also a figurative architect.⁷⁷

In *Louise Bourgeois' Spider* Mieke Bal posits a theoretical framework of architecture as a rich metaphor for body and art, critical theory and psychoanalysis. As a figurative as well as literal space, architecture is an obvious site of articulation of inside and outside. Art historians of the Baroque such as Wölfflin and Jean Rousset have specifically characterised Baroque architecture in terms of the scission between the lavish style of the façade and the serenity of the interior. In *The Fold*, Deleuze sees this as quintessentially Leibnizian in terms of the theory of the 'monad'; 'The monad is the independence of the interior, an interior without exterior. But its correlative is the independence of the façade, an exterior without interior.'⁷⁸ For Deleuze, the ideal Baroque architecture is a 'pure' interior, 'un pur dedans', not even hinting at an exterior; for example, an interior with external light sources disguised.⁷⁹ An example of this can be found in the Cornaro chapel housing Bernini's *Teresa*, where the golden rays above the sculpture conceal a source of light which seems supernatural (Fig. 61).

There is a marked insistence on purity in Deleuze's text, and on the fact that there should be no confusion between inside and outside, reminding us of the discourse of Didi-Huberman. Referring to Bernini's sculptures, Deleuze discusses the relationship between clothes and skin as being 'publicised, extended, and enlarged' in the Baroque.⁸⁰ The scission itself is being privileged, as is indeed later the very space between clothes and skin,



Fig. 61 – view of chapel recess, see ref. Fig. 1

a euphoria of surfaces, which for Deleuze is embodied by the elements, fire for *Teresa*, and earth for *Ludovica*. Mieke Bal makes a similar characterisation in the quotation we saw earlier; 'Her whole body becomes a flame: each part of it, of its cover, its surface but beneath which nothing else remains, becomes a flame; fire comes to overrule previous shapes.'⁸¹

Ironically, in a chapel which is a masterpiece of interior architecture, *Teresa* is a masterpiece of exterior surface: there is no interior because everything is exterior – body and

spirit alike are represented in the play of light and shade on marble. Fire, embodying surface for Deleuze, is body for Bal – but a burnt body, negated in a dancing flame which, since it consumes and moves and overrules shapes, traps the gaze in innumerable surfaces. *Teresa* is transgressive and liberating in many ways, but surprisingly Bal's reading, which on first sight appeared enabling seems to also reinforce and remain integral to a fetishistic visual economy, where excess of surface denies and represses an interior, enabling the reality of the body to be completely subsumed to the all-consuming fire. For Perniola, 'Saint Theresa's body disappears in the drapery of her tunic' – her body is 'engulfed' and 'transformed into fabric'.⁸²

This characterisation of being ‘engulfed’ perhaps becomes suggestive of Kristeva’s characterisation of the function of religious rituals to defend against the abject; ‘...to ward off the subject’s fear of his very own identity sinking irretrievably into the mother.’⁸³ There is also a certain element of the fear of castration inherent in the idea of being engulfed in this substance which evokes aspects of the female anatomy which are occulted in a fetishistic structure. Not coincidentally portrayed forever poised just before receiving once again the penetration of the angel’s golden dart, the saint could be seen to be becoming a cipher of a masculine psychosis where sexuality and desire are either diverted or abjected via the mechanism of excessive surface.

Donna Velata and the hair of the Magdalene

I return once more at this point to Corradini’s *Donna Velata* (Fig. 56). A recent visual response to this sculpture is enlightening concerning the role of the representation of fabric and layering, which in this sculpture reaches disturbing hyperbole. In an exhibition in 2007 at the Louvre in Paris, entitled ‘*Contrepoint*’, contemporary artists were invited to dialogue or ‘counterpoint’ with works from the collection. Didier Ternet composed a work in dialogue with the *Donna Velata* entitled ‘*Douche Douche*’ (Fig. 62), consisting of copper tubing, fragments of marble and pétanque balls. Seemingly poured from a bucket suspended above the head of the sculpture, the copper tubing flows down undulating around the sculpture’s closely veiled body. The balls and other fragments hover threateningly and heavily around the zone created. The network of metal strands repeats the ambiguity of matter already at work in the sculpture: part liquid shower, part rigid metal trap, the sculpture remains passive at the centre of a maelstrom.⁸⁴

The interaction between the copper tubing and the sculpture is profoundly dual. Is it a prison for the sculpture, oppressively pouring upon the marble, or does it on the contrary protect the viewer from the sculpture within? Choosing to doubly veil a veiled sculpture, the artist remarks,

Here, for the Louvre, I prefer the idea of revelation... it is another way to attract attention to this work. There is therefore this desire to attract the gaze... And all that is centred upon the concept of the gaze, of touch... and of touching the gaze...⁸⁵

In the artist’s own words, therefore, it is not a question of concealment but of revelation, and revelation articulated via the interaction between visuality and tactility.



Fig. 62: Didier Tretet, 'Douche Douche', 2007, 'Contrepoint III', Musée du Louvre, Paris

Ironically, however, nowhere does Tretet's installation physically interact with the sculpture. The copper twists and distorts in order to avoid colliding with the marble. The balls and marble pieces whirl around the space of the sculpture without disturbing its reverie.



Fig. 63 – see ref. Fig. 28



Fig. 64: Sandro Botticelli, 'Holy Trinity' (detail), 1465-7, Courtauld Institute, London

Trenet also specifies an image the copper tubes evoke in his mind: 'I also conceive of the undulations of the tubes as hair... evoking that of Mary Magdalene for example. But here, hidden...'⁸⁶ As in Corradini's *Modesty*, this contextualisation, albeit made centuries later, effects a disguised invocation of the figure of Mary Magdalene.

The iconography of Mary Magdalene has long been associated with her long, loose hair. Loose hair was an erotic cipher in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, when it was also a moral indicator; adult women with loose hair signified moral laxity.⁸⁷ In depictions of the Magdalene it may also have signified her common association with the 'sinner' who wiped Jesus' feet with her hair (Luke 7:37). In the medieval Golden Legend

account, certainly partly due to a conflation with the penitent St. Mary of Egypt but which informed representations of the saint for centuries to follow, her body was entirely covered by her hair. In the early Italian Renaissance, Donatello (Fig. 63) and Botticelli (Fig. 64) notably drew inspiration from this image, but it was Titian almost a hundred years later who transformed the attribute into an erotically teasing veil (Fig. 65), strategically parted to reveal the breasts.

By reframing the *Donna Velata* in the hair of the Magdalene, Trenet does not attempt to physically veil the veiled body from sight. Instead the liquid strands of copper hair function to manipulate the gaze even further. Both drawing attention to the sculpture, and frustrating the eye's easy access, the structure invites a penetrative, phallic viewing structure where the 'hairs' must be parted and dodged in order to see the woman beneath. Once this barrier breached, the viewer is yet again taken on a detour across the folds and

hangings of marble fabric which comprise the sculpture itself.

Trenet remarks, however, that the balls and marble pieces suggest lapidation – a threat of violence otherwise unspoken.⁸⁸ It is interesting that the weapons which would wound the female body here represented are kept at a safe distance by the cage-like structure, thereby protecting the body within it. Trenet's fascination with the *Donna Velata* (he confesses to a perennial attraction towards the sculpture) is based, as we have seen, on the tensions between



Fig. 65 – see ref. Fig. 26

looking and touching. Just as Didi-Huberman concluded in *Ouvrir Vénus*, the desire to touch intersects with the desire to penetrate and wound. The cage of copper, then, both protects the sculpture within from the potentially lethal balls and shards, but also, like a fetish, protects the viewer from consummating the wounding which the presence of the weapons forces into conscious possibility. The copper cage is compulsively replaying the prohibition which the sculpture's wet cloth realises.

Griselda Pollock draws attention to the threatening associations of women's hair in a Freudian perspective:

Head hair, moreover, in an image of a woman is, as we know, a displaced sign of secondary sexual hair which incites in the little boy, so we are told, a narcissistic terror sufficient to incite a fetishising fantasy of the Gorgon's wreath of phallic snakes. Freud's study of hysteria revealed the easy path of displacement from the actual erotic zones to less charged locations that inherit oblique evocations of what must not be imagined and certainly never seen.⁸⁹

The suggestion that the glances at the sculpture which are afforded through the parted copper 'hair' may be indexical of a disturbing female sexuality and of fetishistic visuality certainly supports a theory that would describe Trenet's work as having identified the threateningly sexual nature of the viewer's interaction with the *Donna Velata*. A critical commentary on the nature of phallic and fetishistic viewing can be developed by the very art which also reinforces that viewing system. Trenet's intervention upon Corradini's

sculpture is functioning as a critical reading of that sculpture while itself being a critical object.

Forms of fetishistic visuality: Anish Kapoor

It is clear that Corradini's sculptures function in a very different way from Bernini's. Both are however participating in a form of visuality which operates in terms of inside and outside. Whether the female body and its coverings are built up in paradoxical layers, compelling the gaze to participate in discourses of penetration, or whether it is turned inside-out, voided, the bodily nature of femininity is being constructed in a similar way, which precludes a fully empathetic sexual visual response to the female body while perpetuating centuries of objectification within visual culture.

In the same way, the ruched, creased, folded marble of the fully-clothed *Teresa* can be said to be analogous to the sealed, perfect, smooth female nudes which Lynda Nead deconstructs. Smoothness or folds, the difference here is irrelevant as both can operate similarly – the insistence on surface operates a visual detour enabling the interior of the body to be negated. The discourse of interior and exterior is not only put to work, however, by literal representations of female bodies. A parallel with several works by British artist



Fig. 66: Anish Kapoor, 'Turning the World Inside-Out', 1995, Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York

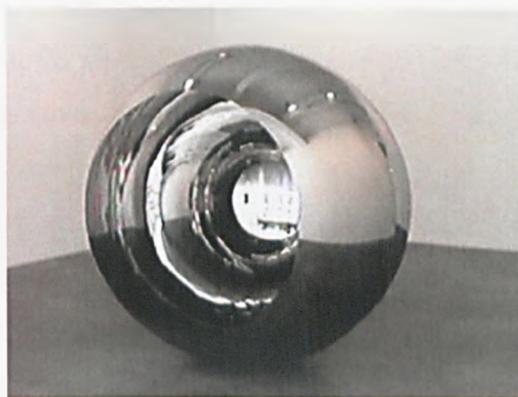


Fig. 67: Anish Kapoor, 'Turning the World Upside-Down #4', 1998, Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York

Anish Kapoor from the last two decades can help provide another critical commentary to shed light on the way in which the *Teresa*'s folds uphold a fetishistic visual economy.

In Baroque art, as Bal notes in *Quoting Caravaggio*, the first awareness of point of view seems to be articulated.⁹⁰ That is, the gaze can now be situated outside of the self; it becomes non-monolithic and multiple. This means that the subject is put in danger: its

position is no longer certain, as it can be inherent in the object. In a very 'Baroque' visual tradition, Kapoor's *Inside-out* (Fig. 66) and *Upside-down* (Fig. 67) from 1995 and 1998 respectively, the supremely reflective surface not only diverts and disallows the gaze upon it but in turns sucks self, Other, and gaze into the indeterminate space of its 'interior'.⁹¹ It is a mirror which is simultaneously deeply self-absorbed, as an excess of reflection is an



Fig. 68: Anish Kapoor, 'Turing the World Inside Out (detail)'

excess of the self-image, but also deeply self-alienating. Unlike the mirror in Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, where the image of seductive unity allows a 'self', albeit an illusory one, to be conceived of, the mirror in the work of Kapoor operates in a different way. The curved, impossible surface refuses, controls and possesses the false self-image until it is put in doubt. Viewers of the 2004 sculpture *Cloud Gate* (Fig. 69), designed for Chicago's Millennium Park, feel compelled to search for their own image in the bewildering swoops and curves.⁹² This all-surface is both fascinatingly beautiful, and profoundly threatening, profoundly implicating the subject's gaze while threatening its very coherence by suggesting that both subject and gaze are being sucked inside an interior which cannot be known or imagined, the sense of surface is so overwhelming. It is a metaphor both for the primal scene and for the mechanism of fetishism, which destabilises the subject/object relationship.

I am arguing that the tradition of the depiction of the female nude is a form of art which I suggest is sited in a fundamentally phallic aesthetic. Bernini's *Teresa* and the mirrored sculptures by Anish Kapoor, are but two examples, from vastly different contexts, of the way in which this discourse can be present throughout Western visual culture. Such



Fig. 69: Anish Kapoor, 'Cloud Gate', 2004-5, Chicago Millennium Park.

images, by articulating the particular threat posed to the masculine psyche by the abject through the transgression of boundaries, uphold a psychosis within visual culture which attempts to close off boundaries of the body, and reinforce fetishism: a neurotic mode of sexuality, displaying a gendered and gendering horror of a projection onto the wounded and wounding woman.

Cindy Sherman and the discourse of fetishistic viewing

It is not only the work of male artists which is concerned by a problematic participation in discourses of fetishistic viewing. The series sometimes referred to as 'Disasters' by the American photographer Cindy Sherman includes very difficult images involving blood, vomit, suggestions of human excrement of different types, where the eye cannot fix on one point; disturbing and upsetting pictures which are tremendously provocative in their absolute refusal of the type of clichéd, masquerading female body which Sherman plays with in her earlier photographs. In 'Untitled #167' (Fig. 70), a nose,



Fig. 70: Cindy Sherman, 'Untitled #167', 1986. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

lips, teeth and bloodstained fingers protrude from the soil amid other detritus. A white, horrifying part-reflection in a compact mirror indexes the intrusion of a disturbingly present yet absent witness (and a manipulation of the expectation to find a self-portrait of the artist, as was Sherman's custom until shortly after this point in her career.) In 'Untitled #173' a pile of soil laid with bloodstained clumps of hair, mould and flies, sharp wooden skewers, a rotting potato, shocks with the inclusion of the artist's body, eyes staring blankly, along the top of the frame, giving an overpowering impression of death. 'Untitled #175' induces literal feelings of nausea; crushed cream cakes, sun lotion, biscuits and sandwiches lie oozing, trampled on the sand while at the right hand side a semi-liquid mass suggesting vomit spreads across a white towel. In the lens of a pair of sunglasses, a deeply horrific disembodied screaming face – that of the artist – is reflected, petrified in the horror of vision.

Laura Mulvey draws on this series of photographs as examples of work which destroys the structures of fetishism. For Mulvey, in these photographs 'the topography of exterior/interior is exhausted'.⁹³ She suggests that,

although both sexes are subject to abjection, it is women who can explore and analyse the phenomenon with greater equanimity, as it is the female body that has come, not exclusively but predominantly, to represent the shudder aroused by liquidity and decay.⁹⁴

Through Sherman's citation and distortion of the visuality of the feminine, Mulvey identifies in Sherman's work an articulation of

the failure of the fetish, which she traces through images of the feminine... The wordlessness and despair in her work represents the wordlessness and despair that ensues when a fetishistic structure, the means of erasing history and memory, collapses, leaving a void in its wake.⁹⁵

Mulvey argues that Sherman's work accesses the 'abject', in the Kristevan sense, via the suggestion of a pre-language state where meaning itself is taken to the extreme, then reassigned to dramatise the predicament of the feminine in culture.

She uses iconography, connotation, or the sliding of the signifier, in a trajectory that ends by stripping away all accrued meaning to the limit of bodily matter. However, even this bedrock—the vomit and the blood for instance—returns to cultural significance: that is, to the difficulty of the body, and above all the female body, while it is subjected to the icons and narratives of fetishism.⁹⁶

I feel, however, that while these photographs oppose fetishism in one sense, they are also working within its economy, reinforcing the same associations between 'horror' and femininity. Rather than removing or exhausting questions of exterior/interior, they are, on

the contrary, pigeonholing femininity into an excess of interior. Although the boundaries of the body are transgressed, they are still operating; we are merely on the other side. These works are, therefore, still functioning within the same psychoanalytic/sexual model. Mulvey foresees this form of accusation but interprets Sherman's position as deliberate participation in such discourses in order to undermine them.

In refusing the word/image juxtaposition, so prevalent in the art of the seventies and eighties, Sherman may draw the accusation that she is, herself, stuck in the topographic double bind of the fetish and its collapse. Although she may be thus unable to inscribe the means of decipherment into the work itself, her use of *Untitled* to describe her works turns inability into refusal.⁹⁷

Mulvey argues that the spectator can perform an 'oscillation' between enjoying the image on an initial level, and perceiving the irony of its setup. 'The viewer looks, recognizes a style, doubts, does a double take, then recognizes that the style is a citation, and meanings shift and change their reference like shifting perceptions of perspective from an optical illusion.'⁹⁸ Rosalind Krauss expresses it similarly: that Sherman's work invites the viewer 'to look under the hood, even as she is also showing us the tremendous pull to buy into the myth'.⁹⁹ In the case of the 'Disaster' images, the viewer's response will be different: still an 'oscillation effect', but 'this time between reverence and revulsion'.¹⁰⁰ Mulvey's argument is that Sherman's work reveals the operation of the fetish: 'Cindy Sherman traces the abyss or morass that overwhelms the defetishized body, deprived of the fetish's semiotic, reduced to being 'unspeakable' and devoid of significance.'¹⁰¹

J. Fiona Ragheb and Elizabeth T. Smith have both argued that Sherman's gradual removal of her own self-portrait from her work, in evidence around this period, is as a negative response to feminist theory's appropriation of her work. Michelle Meagher notes:

What for Mulvey and Krauss was a sophisticated move documenting the artist's engagement in feminist discourse is for Ragheb and Smith a sign of her desire to distance herself from feminist discourse. What is important to note is the insistence upon justifying Sherman's artistic decision to take herself out of the picture and, as already noted, the justification is often made through the retelling of encounters between the work and feminist theory.¹⁰²

Attempting to identify Cindy Sherman's real political agenda is a wild goose chase here, as Michelle Meagher shows. Meagher summarises the position of 'Sherman Studies' in the twenty-first century as 'a struggle between analyses that claim the work re-represents and challenges the codes of femininity and those that claim the work reiterates and reinscribes those codes'.¹⁰³ Where I feel that her earlier photographs such as the 'Untitled Film Stills' and more particularly the 'Centerfolds' do participate in an ironic defetishising

of visual discourses of the body, and I will demonstrate this in my final chapter, her experiments with the abject ultimately seem to me to remain inscribed within a discourse which constructs the female body as one-dimensional.

Orlan and the emptiness of the object

The work of French performance artist Orlan specifically engages with notions of the interior and exterior of the body. In her most notorious artistic statement she performs what she describes as ‘carnal art’, having herself filmed undergoing plastic surgery. The original aim of her initial operations was to undermine classic ideals of beauty by herself embodying a composite version of beauty, as seen in Fig. 71: ‘not to combine multiple elements of beauty in the hope of becoming the ultimate ideal woman, but rather to deconstruct the very notion that such a thing could actually exist.’¹⁰⁴ A much more potent consequence of her public surgery performances, however, is the reflection on bodily limits and the nature of skin, surface and identity, with which her public surgical interventions inevitably engage the viewer.



Fig. 71: Orlan, Presentation of composite face project, ‘The Reincarnation of St. Orlan’, 1990

Parveen Adams’ ‘Operation Orlan’ remains the seminal text analysing Orlan’s surgery art in terms of inside and outside. Adams reads in Orlan’s work a profound exploration of the emptiness of the object. Following the same trace as Georges Didi-Huberman would take up, to different effect, three years later in *Ouvrir Vénus*, Adams argues that the eighteenth-century medical wax models of nude Venuses (Fig. 72), whose skin then different layers of internal organs could be removed one by one, merely permit

the woman's body to be conceived of as a series of layers to be penetrated right down to the centre. She writes, '...without its lid, it is agape with its organs exposed. This figure permits, indeed invites our sexual predatoriness as the response to its passivity.'¹⁰⁵ For Adams, Orlan's work escapes from this trap:

By contrast, Orlan is not unveiled or stripped bare. There is no signifying interior to be discovered. Rather, the detachment of her face, a manoeuvre which reveals it as pure exteriority, is one which casts a doubt on representation, which insists on its emptiness.¹⁰⁶

...There is, suddenly, no inside and no outside. There is an emptying out of the object. It is the moment, a horrifying moment, of the birth of a new space which ruins habitable space.¹⁰⁷



Fig. 73: Orlan, 'Omnipresence', 1993, plate from Adams, p. 155



Fig. 74: Orlan, 'Omnipresence', 1993, plate from Adams, p. 157

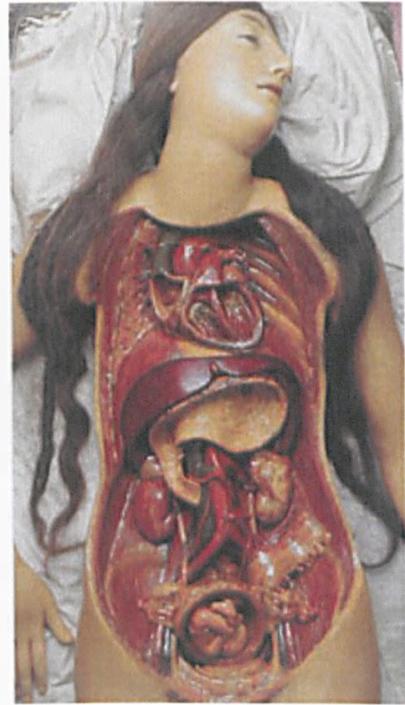


Fig. 72: Clemente Susini, Reclining female figure ("Medical Venus"), late 18th century, La Specola, University of Florence

Adams notes that the camera does not show what is actually underneath the skin of the face. Instead, it is the gap created when the face is lifted up which is at the centre of the image (Fig. 73 and Fig. 74). It is a space belonging to neither inside nor outside, what Adam describes as 'the emptying out of the space of the object.'¹⁰⁸ This is for Adams an 'unfillable gap' which it is the concern of Orlan's work to generate: a gap which destabilises gender difference by eradicating the idea of an ideal, complete body.

Michelle Hirschhorn puts forward a related argument. She sees in Orlan's work an evocation of the horrific maternal body as developed in particular in the work of Barbara Creed. Creed writes, 'Confronted by the sight of the monstrous, the

viewing subject is put into crisis – boundaries, designed to keep the abject at bay, threaten

to disintegrate, collapse.’¹⁰⁹ Hirschhorn likens the wounds and cuts made on the face of Orlan during the operation to symbols of threatening, gaping and perhaps castrating female genitalia (Fig. 75). She sees Orlan as courageously embodying a feminist discourse of the body which would destabilise monolithic subject and object positions.



Fig. 75: Orlan, 'Omnipresence', 1993

A tension seems to arise, in these analyses, between vision and the lack of vision. For Adams, the key to the significance of Orlan's action was the ultimately unseeable 'gap' beneath the face. This concept of the 'emptiness of the object' for Adams opened up the space of representation. For Hirschhorn, it is precisely the extreme visibility inherent in the operations which performs the ultimate political statement in the work: Orlan herself, active while operated upon, is seen as demanding inescapable viewing in which the whole body participates.

The image of 'horror' ... puts the viewing subject's sense of unified self into crisis, when the imagery becomes too threatening or horrific to watch... [Orlan's] active role... and defiant gaze literally demand an alternative method of viewing, which automatically usurps the safe distance between self and other which is required in order to 'look away'. The body itself becomes the organ of sight, and thus disperses the impact over its entirety. Her work therefore challenges us to find a way in which we can 'look' long enough to gain a greater understanding of the precariously complex psychic constructions which constitute the very foundations of our identity.¹¹⁰

Adams also speaks of the whole body responding to the work, in her case in the form of a physical sensation of intrusion when watching the video of Orlan's surgery: 'I am invaded by the experience of the body, heavy with its density.'¹¹¹

Other photographs from the seventh operation, entitled *Omnipresence*, differ from those illustrated by Adams, and indeed do not hesitate to show more 'internal' details (Fig. 76 and Fig. 77). They may be seen to put in doubt her conclusion based on the ultimate unseeability of the 'gap'. Orlan, after all, may merely be participating in a penetrative model of the female body, where flesh is removable; the body is submissive, enterable.



Fig. 76: Orlan, 'Omnipresence', 1993



Fig. 77: Orlan, 'Omnipresence', 1993

As Mulvey does for Sherman, Adams seeks to defend Orlan's work against interpretations which would suggest that her work merely reinforces phallic and fetishistic viewing systems. She writes that while Orlan's work undermines the illusion of the complete, sealed body of femininity,

[it] doesn't deny it, rather it shows the copresence of the phallic and the castrated that the 'real' world... insists are exclusive of each other. This belongs not to psychosis but to an artistic labour.¹¹²

Theresa Senft questions the possibility of Orlan's work providing a 'techno-feminist model', contextualising it within the politics of feminism and art, and arguing that despite Orlan's insistence that her work is not about shock, the shock effect does indeed end up being a form of manipulation.

The avant-garde has long championed what they called the 'explicit body', citing it as a source of immanence and transcendence... The fact is, however, that [it] isn't enough for a feminist artist to shock in her explicit body work; to have the desired political effects, [Orlan] discovered, her body must produce the right kinds of shock.¹¹³

For Senft, the problem is twofold. On the one hand, she critiques Orlan's simplistic conception of the process of vision as related to her performance, in the context of Donna Haraway's notion of the female cyborg. For Senft, Orlan is concerned only with her personal transformation reinstating a 'traditionally' avant-garde notion of an extreme 'shocking' body.¹¹⁴ She accuses Orlan's work of narcissism, in its obliviousness to the

wider ramifications of her body modification and its participation in discourses of the female body in relation to technology, which result in Orlan inscribing herself in the very discourses of femininity which her work proclaimed to undermine.

Orlan proposes that when we watch her performances, we do so dialectically; we ought to "do what you probably do when you watch the news on television". When Donna Haraway watches the news, she sees... an international network of cyborgs, linked by technologies that both pleasure and discipline their lives. Orlan, it seems, sees only herself. Less than fifteen years after Haraway wrote 'A Cyborg Manifesto', Orlan has achieved fame for displaying her body, not as the cyborg of the nightly news, but rather as the cyborg who becomes a goddess, thereby missing Haraway's political point completely.¹¹⁵

A decade after Orlan's surgery-performances, and with the alteration in our image culture provided by the accessibility and universality of the internet, the banality of 'shock' footage of surgery and photography of the mutilated body is increasing. Orlan's excess of visibility may merely be playing into the hands of the fetishising structure where the body is either hypertrophically veiled, or catastrophically laid open to the gaze. Senft instead argues for an alternative politics of visibility, following the work of Peggy Phelan who has argued for 'an active vanishing, a deliberate and conscious refusal to take the payoff of visibility.'¹¹⁶ In this response to a society inexorably producing a fetishistically visualised female body, Senft concludes her article with a call to be 'woman', rather than goddess or cyborg.

Proposing an alternative

Whichever analysis of Orlan's work is accepted, neither agenda seems ultimately satisfactory. On the one hand, feminist art which aims to draw attention to the status quo of phallic visuality may fall into the trap of merely reproducing its language. Such battles from within lay themselves open to being interpreted at face value. Michelle Meagher demonstrates as much when she cites the lascivious responses of Cindy Sherman's early male critics to the *Untitled Film Stills*.¹¹⁷

On the other hand, despite the appeal of a position such as that of Phelan, which could extricate the female body from complex tropes of visual femininity, a vanishing and refusal of visibility leaves unspoken for those artworks which may achieve an alternative to this fetishistic structure of viewing.

The agenda now laid out, therefore, consists of identifying those articulations of subjectivity operating *within* visual culture, but which find ways of travelling beyond the duality of interior and exterior to signify a corporeality which permits an embodied feminine subjectivity to have a place in visuality.

Chapter Three

It may be possible for art to engage with the structures of phallogentric and fetishistic viewing which form the history of the female body in representation on their own terms, from within their language. Although the previous chapter closed on art and performance which ultimately, in my view, failed to undermine the phallogentric structure of viewing, they may open up spaces for other facets of visuality from different periods in history to emerge on different terms, as dissonant statements: in their encounter performing a valorisation of the paradox of simultaneity which has engaged the female body in representation for centuries, and challenging preconceptions about a visuality structured around binary opposition. Beginning by tracking a *pathos formula* from the antique which defines a certain element of the 'Caravaggesque' visuality which I have been developing, I shall continue in this chapter to propose a visual discourse whereby an embodied subjectivity can begin to be articulated via the paradoxes of a contradictory body which destabilises traditional tropes of femininity. Through encounters between inside and outside, performance and submission, pleasure and pain, the physical and the spiritual, I shall move gradually to a position from which such dualism can ultimately become redundant in visual events which rethink the nature of the body itself.

The hands of the Magdalene

Massive, potent even in her stillness, the *Penitent Magdalene* portrayed by Artemisia Gentileschi in the 1620s provides a contrast with the meek sweetness of many contemporary representations of the saint. She is depicted sitting in a carved wooden chair, one hand resting between her legs. Her right elbow rests on the arm of the chair and her right hand, bent acutely at the wrist, supports her head which rests heavily upon it. The Magalene's rippling auburn hair twines around the fingers of her right hand and the white and gold fabric of her dress falls from her shoulder.¹ Referring to this painting Mary Garrard writes, 'The verticality of Mary's body, as well as the vitality of the drapery folds over the legs, implies potential action, energy in reserve, while the upper body is fully submissive to the spirit.'² For Garrard, the painting incorporates both activity and passivity, vitality and submission; the body encompasses multiple dynamics of movement and emotion. More than a century of eroticising depictions of the saint preceded this painting:

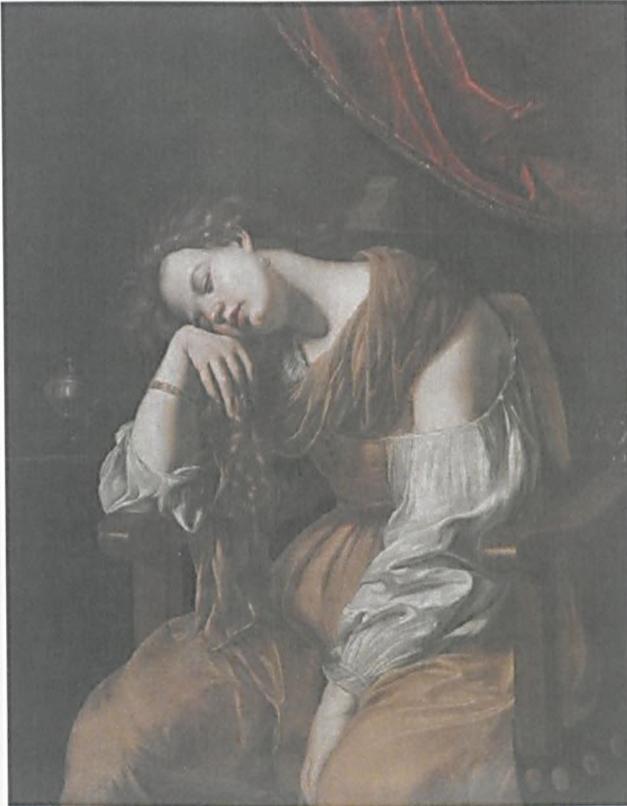


Fig. 78: Artemisia Gentileschi, 'Magdalene', c. 1625-6, Cathedral, Sala del Tesoro, Seville, Spain

the iconography of the *Magdalene's* pose: from the etching by Léon Davent which shows the young Michelangelo in a pose of melancholy (Fig. 79), to Michelangelo's own sculpture *Night* (Fig. 80). Garrard suggests that Gentileschi took inspiration both from the associations with Michelangelo's creative melancholy and the spiritual interpretation of the posture in the feminine, originally evident in an engraving representing a vision of St. Helena by Marcantonio Raimondi (Fig. 81) and subsequently taken up in a painting by Paolo Veronese (Fig. 82). While the head

Guido Reni, Gentileschi's contemporary, was particularly well-known for painting sensuous semi-nude *Penitent Magdalenes*.³ In Artemisia Gentileschi's version of the popular subject, however, the saint does not fit the pattern of the passive, graceful, erotically reclining nude. This woman hunches forward in her chair, her limbs and head heavy, yet she is not submissively unconscious or abandoned in sleep - her body seems paradoxically charged with passion.

Gentileschi permeates the *Magdalene* (Fig. 78) with associations of creative melancholy. Mary Garrard traces references to Michelangelo in

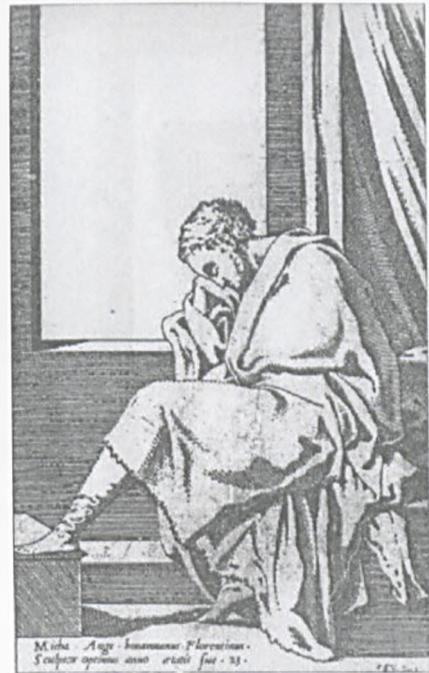


Fig. 79: Léon Davent, 'Michelangelo at the age of twenty-three', mid-16th century, British Museum, London

resting on the cheek was a common signifier of the melancholic visionary, the specific and unusual angle of the bent hand upon which the Magdalene's head rests may derive from the Michelangelo etching while the position of the other hand, falling between the knees, does suggest *St. Helena*.



Fig. 80: Michelangelo Buonarroti, 'Night', 1519-33, Tomb of Giuliano de' Medici; Medici Chapel, Florence



Fig. 81: Marcantonio Raimondi, 'Saint Helena', early 16th century, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Fig. 82: Paolo Veronese, 'Saint Helena', 1560-65, National Gallery, London

The emotion and intensity of Gentileschi's *Magdalene* certainly owes something to that of Caravaggio, painted around sixteen years previously (Fig. 27). Not only is the figure of the saint in both images imbued with an ambiguous force, but several elements in the paintings play a similar function.

In the version of Gentileschi's *Magdalene* in Mexico City (Fig. 83), which may or may not be a copy by the artist, the swathe of drapery (which was added later to the Seville version by another hand) is not present, and the artist's original intention before this censorship intervened can be seen (Fig. 85).⁴ As Mary Garrard puts it, Gentileschi paints

the 'wrinkle of a solid natural underarm.'⁵ In the Caravaggio work, the crease of the Magdalene's neck meeting her shoulder as her head falls back (rather than forward and to the side, in the Gentileschi *Magdalene*) is similarly movingly natural (Fig. 86). Signifying more than a mere effect of bodily realism, these bodily folds, as well as the visible teeth and partly opened eyes of both figures, participate in a dialogue of limits. Here, rather than presenting the viewer with a sealed, immaculate female body, inviting (in Didi-Huberman's reading) an inevitable and catastrophic penetration, these bodies present the viewer with fabric, layers, folds, flesh, orifices, all of which suggest a movement towards an interior but which, crucially, also evoke mental presence.⁶ The combination of elements leads to disagreement even within individual works. Keith Christiansen goes as far as to say that 'her eyes, slightly open, suggest a wakeful state' while elsewhere citing the original inventory of the painting in the 1630s as a 'Magdalene seated in a chair sleeping on her arm'.⁷

It is clear that such discrepancy requires investigation. We have seen how Griselda Pollock argues that partly open eyes suggesting a mental presence within an apparently abandoned body, thus potentially disabling a voyeuristic gaze upon that body: 'Veiled by the drooping eyelids, yet once encountered, that momentary sign of consciousness polices any purely scopic relation to the body, making the body a site of being.'⁸ Robert Rosenblum locates a specific challenge for a male viewer in the very doubt:

...the ambiguity of her eyes, that seem to be closed but that a close look reveals that she is awake. ...A nude who could be asleep or awake is especially formidable for a male viewer.⁹

Didi-Huberman's analysis of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* and Andrew Stewart's response to the antique *Knidian Venus*, cited earlier, however appear to respond specifically to the sense of consciousness evoked in such depictions. For them, the sense of subjective presence in depictions of the female nude is what enables eroticism: to express it crudely, the sense of presence in a body otherwise coded absent or passive is read as a form of 'playing hard to get' which tantalises and arouses the desiring gaze. Despite the possibility of reading a 'wakeful state' into Gentileschi's *Magdalene* (Fig. 78), R. Ward Bissell sees it as 'vulnerable', 'provocative', 'tantalising', and 'enticing due to the slipping of the gown at her shoulder, which, he says 'might continue [its] fall.'¹⁰ Rosenblum's 'formidable' does not necessarily preclude erotic fascination. Pollock recognises that,

As much as we may seek and even find signs of difference, we may have to concede that they work all the better to make *Cleopatra* the object of a fantasising

and sexualising gaze – for some men where the collision of eroticism and death forms part of a violent, or at least ambivalent, sexuality. Could we, however, begin to trace the point at which conflicting interests were negotiated to create an image that simultaneously could be read in conformity – though creatively adventurous in its way of doing this – with dominant *masculine* taste while also insinuating into that official space the presence of competing *feminine* meanings depending on the interests or gender of the viewer?¹¹

Whether the eyes are read as open or closed, awake or asleep, and what the nature of the erotic response may be, depends on a particular viewing agenda. What is particularly significant, in Pollock's view, is a work of art which enables many different agendas to coexist.

Layering of drapery and nude female bodies need not always conform to Didi-Huberman's 'inevitable process of opening'. The half-fallen fabric on the shoulders of both Gentileschi's and Caravaggio's *Magdalenes* (Fig. 78 and Fig. 27) both invites and refuses a gaze upon the body's surface. Through the *pudeur* of being half-covered, the object regains the agency to refuse that that gaze be imposed.

From the gently fallen fabric to the natural crease of skin, to the interior world hinted at from underneath the eyelids swollen with tears – it is a question here of multiple interacting surfaces; a psychic topography which leads the gaze towards the ultimate interior of the human subject but without an inevitable horror of emptiness or risk of abjection. Here the body is not sealed, the interaction between inside and outside is fluid. The body, therefore, does not fall so easily into a fetishistic structure. The tears falling from the saint's eyes, in themselves, stand for the difference. The gap between interior and exterior is ultimately bridged in the very moment of tears, the body's clearest outward signifier of intense emotion. Tears both belong to the realm of the abject, by means of a physical leakage and trace on the exterior surface, but have a special status: non-polluting, they also play a pivotal role as tropes of meaning both in their association with penitence and in the special status given them by the Magdalene. The tears of the Magdalene, according to Elizabeth Davis, 'are to be understood as the most perfect confession: according to the "literature of tears" tradition that sprang up throughout Europe during the Counter Reformation after the Council of Trent, Mary's tears are the external sign of her inner state.'¹²

Julia Kristeva has argued that milk and tears are both 'metaphors of non-language, of a "semiotic" that does not coincide with linguistic communication.'¹³ In the biblical associations of Mary Magdalene, tears play just this role when the 'sinner', frequently

associated with the Magdalene's identity, washes Jesus' feet with her tears, which become a potent nonverbal sign of love and faith:

She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. ...[Jesus said] "Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven... Your faith has saved you; go in peace." (Luke, 7:39, 48-51)

In this physical interaction with Jesus, which Davis encourages should be read as active rather than submissive on the woman/Magdalene's part, tears both literally outwardly express innermost feelings, and, along with the hair (transgressing an associated with seduction or loose morals), serve as a tool to emphasise that the Magdalene, identified by association in the biblical text, wields the body metaphorically. Her attention to and interaction with Christ is a profoundly physical one where the body alone can articulate meaning.¹⁴ This emphasis sets the scene for a Magdalene whose transgression of boundaries (as she also breaks social boundaries in this scene by entering the house of the Pharisee unbidden) is situated in the signs of the speaking body.



Fig. 83: (a copy after?) Artemisia Gentileschi, 'Magdalene', c. 1621-2, Musco Soumaya, Mexico City



Fig. 84 – see ref. Fig. 27



Fig. 85: Artemisia Gentileschi, 'Magdalene (detail)', Mexico City



Fig. 86: detail, see ref. Fig. 27

Intertwined fingers

As well as the shifts, folds and layers produced by the fabric, shoulder, mouth and eyes in these paintings, there is another interaction and series of folds in operation in the Caravaggio work: the position of the Magdalene's hands with her fingers intertwined. Such an intimate articulation of inside and outside combined with self-reflexivity is a striking feature of the painting, and often goes uncommented.¹⁵ Caravaggio's choice here may have more significance than mere naturalism.

In Avigdor Posèq's 1991 article about the posture of the Caravaggio *Magdalene*, he attributes the position of the body and head to antique sources. On the position of the

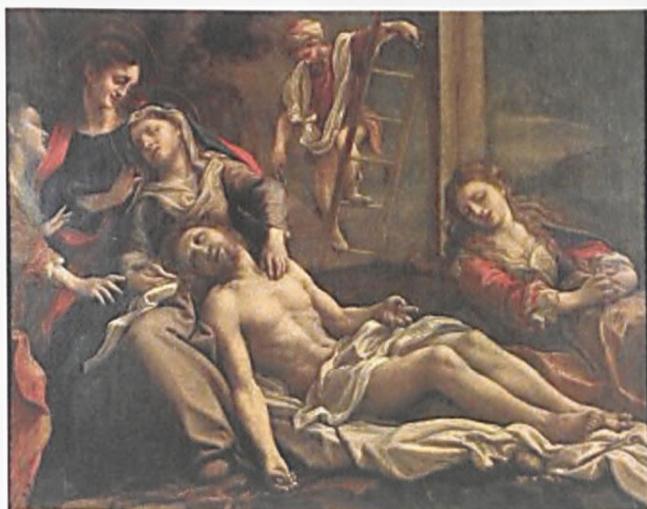


Fig. 87: Correggio, 'Deposition from the Cross', 1525, Galleria Nazionale, Palma

hands, noting that interlinked fingers are rare in antique sculpture (which preferred asymmetrical postures to express profound emotion), Posèq cites various examples of earlier 'lamentation' scenes, where the Magdalene has a gesture of clasped fingers, including a scene by Correggio (Fig. 87). He summarises, 'This attitude of the hands is a conventional gesture of inner

turbulence and awe, sometimes also of grief...' and concludes that, since there is no compelling artistic precedent for Caravaggio's specific usage of this gesture that it must

derive from ‘non-artistic reality’.¹⁶ Posèq goes on to argue that it is part of a centuries-old Neapolitan gestural language meaning ‘an intense spiritual affliction’ known as *mestizia*, based on the work of nineteenth-century archaeologist Andrea de Jorio. He concludes that the particularly powerful impact of this *Magdalene* ‘results from an invigoration of an antique ‘Pathosformel’ by elements drawn directly from life’, but that artists who clearly drew influence from the work in their representations of ecstasy (such as Bernini) chose not to reproduce the hands, perhaps signifying that they ‘may have seemed lacking the conventional “decorum”’.¹⁷

There are other *Magdalenes* with clasped fingers, however, which may have taken inspiration from Caravaggio in their use of the pose.¹⁸ Guercino (Fig. 88) reproduces the gesture in the classic context of an impassioned grief and repentance, and Nuvolone (Fig. 89) and Guido Reni (Fig. 91) provide a sentimentalised interpretation of the Caravaggio painting, with the saint represented in a form of ecstatic reverie. Where the Reni uses the hands as an attribute of prayer or grief, the position of the arms of the *Magdalene* in Fig. 89, however, with the hands pushed downwards and away from the body, seems to refer specifically to the motif as used by Caravaggio, shortly before its use for the *Magdalene*.



Fig. 88: Guercino, ‘Magdalene and two angels (detail)’, 1622, Pinacotheca, Vatican

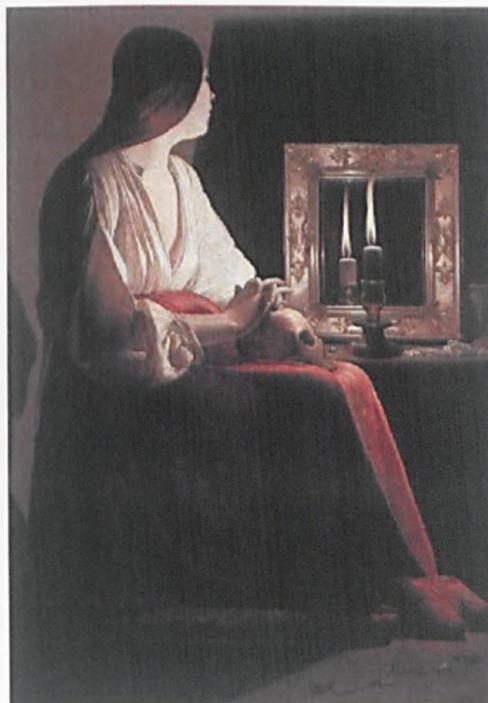


Fig. 90: Georges de La Tour, ‘Magdalene’, 1625-50, Wrightsman Collection, New York



Fig. 89: Carlo Francesco Nuvolone, 'Magdalene', mid seventeenth century



Fig. 91: Guido Reni, 'Repentant Magdalene'

Indeed, Caravaggio had used the motif of the interlaced fingers several years prior to the *Magdalene*, in the painting the *Taking of Christ* (Fig. 92), representing the moment of Judas' betrayal. The relationship between these two paintings is of vital importance for the discourse of an embodied subjectivity.

Sergio Benedetti describes the figure of Christ: 'His hands, so prominently placed at the bottom of the picture's central axis, are clasped in a gesture of faith.'¹⁹ An article in the *Daily Telegraph*, reporting on the recent controversy surrounding the attribution of the various versions of this work, defines the hand gesture as 'indicating a partnership in the creation of a saviour through betrayal'.²⁰ Here the authors seem to be suggesting that the joined hands symbolise two connected concepts: that of Judas' betrayal, and that of the destiny of Christ to die on the cross, which became fixed in that moment.

Giovan Pietro Bellori's seventeenth century description of the scene was as follows: 'Judas has his hand on the Master's shoulder, after the kiss; at the same time a soldier in full armour reaches out his ironclad arm and hand toward the breast of the Lord, who stands still, patient and meek, with his hands intertwined before him.'²¹ Conspiracy theorist Jeff Nisbet gives an alternative reading of the hand position of Christ:

In fact, Caravaggio's rather bored-looking Christ, one eyebrow raised, appears to be doing little more than cracking his knuckles. To the far-right Caravaggio, in one of several self-portraits, holds up a lantern in true Luciferian fashion as though suggesting that this pivotal Biblical event may have been meticulously planned by the main participant – an idea that has found wider acceptance in the last 40 years than it had back in Caravaggio's day.²²

Nisbet's fascination with Christ's incongruous hand position leads him to suspect that through the strangeness and detachment of the figure, Caravaggio was hinting at an awareness and planning on the part of Christ which would suggest, in an idea which has been gaining in popularity in the last fifty years, that Christ was complicit in the planning of his own crucifixion in order to fulfil the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament.²³ What is relevant here, however, is that Nisbet's perception identifies the hand gesture



Fig. 92: Caravaggio, 'Taking of Christ', c. 1598-1603, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin

above all as a sign of consciousness within the figure of Christ: a metonymic sign of control, self-possession. Christ observes his own hands, his forehead creased in concentration. He is distanced from the action, out of the time-frame of the picture, isolated from the maelstrom surrounding him as well as from the otherwise forceful movement of figures from right to left. The drama is intensified by the figure of John leaving the scene on the left, his billowing cloak enclosing the faces of Christ and Judas, his posture iconically referencing the maenad figure also associated with the Magdalene. Christ's

stillness and absorption is markedly contrasted, and indeed, the only figure who likewise seems separated, frozen in time, is the one who cranes his head above the crowd to see – and literally shed light on – the main focus of the suspended moment, the kiss between Judas and Christ: Caravaggio himself.²⁴

Demosthenes and the visuality of paradoxical absorption

Kristina Fiore prefers to simply describe the hands as ‘a simple token of self control, which Caravaggio develops into a grand gesture derived from antiquity’.²⁵ Fiore identifies the antique sculpture of Demosthenes (Fig. 93) as a possible source while mentioning the hands as signifying grief for Andrea de Jorio, a source common to Posèq’s essay on the *Magdalene* (Fig. 27).²⁶ However, the allusion to antiquity in this case is more significant than merely lending ‘grandeur’ to a contemporary gesture. The statue of Demosthenes, rather than remaining merely a formal footnote, may be at the heart of the meaning of both the *Taking of Christ* and the *Magdalene*, and may allow a way to describe the visual juxtaposition at work in this particularly striking motif of Caravaggio’s.

Paul Zanker draws attention to the paradoxical and difficult posture of the philosopher in the ancient statue:

Demosthenes seems to be entirely absorbed in himself. His hands are clasped before him, the head turned to the side, and the gaze directed downward. Despite what looks at first like a quiet pose, the orator is actually shown in a state of extreme mental tension. The brows are almost painfully drawn together, and the position of the arms and legs is not at all relaxed. Everything about the statue is severe and angular, at times even ugly.²⁷

Demosthenes was an Athenian orator and statesman who opposed the Macedonian military aggression towards Athens. Paul Zanker points out that, even though ‘the clasped hands are supposed to be a gesture of mourning, to suggest that the failed statesman laments the loss of freedom, a warning to future generations’, the inscription below the statue belies an interpretation of failure; indeed it implicitly praises Demosthenes for realising the danger,



Fig. 93: ‘Demosthenes’, 4th century. Roman copy of an original by Polyeuctus, 280/79 B.C. Former (correct) restoration. NY Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen

only regretting that he was not listened to by the Athenian government.²⁸ So a traditional interpretation does not strictly fit the hand gesture.

What is more significant is Demosthenes' reputation. He was famous as an orator for his 'emotional speaking style'. Demetrius of Phaleron recorded that, 'the masses delighted in his lively presentation, while the better class of people found his gestures vulgar and affected.'²⁹ For an orator famous for a vigorous gestural speaking style to be represented in a specifically downplayed and absorbed posture lends weight of meaning to the juxtaposition. Zanker notes,

The statue revives these old accusations of theatrical gestures but refutes them and at the same time praises Demosthenes for his passionate commitment. That is, it asserts, in spite of the extreme effort and concentration of the great patriotic speeches, the speaker never lost his self-control. He grasps his hands firmly before him to show that he has mastered his emotions. Though extremely tense, he does not move his arms, and the mantle remains properly draped. But he is no actor, like his rival Aeschines, who would assume a rehearsed and artificial pose. Rather than showing himself off, he is concerned only with the matter at hand.³⁰

Zanker continues by analysing the facial expression of Demosthenes. Very much like Caravaggio's *Christ* (Fig. 92), and to a lesser extent the *Magdalene* (Fig. 86), the orator's forehead is creased not in mourning but in concentration. Referring to the overall effect of the posture Zanker concludes, 'we are witnessing here a new paradigm for expressing intellectual activity'.³¹

Intellectual activity here is visually located in a specifically bodily juxtaposition of opposing forces. Contained within the self-reflexivity of the hands, the intertwined fingers simultaneously casual and intense, there is a suggestion that an embodied, thinking and feeling individual is being depicted at a moment of intense crisis or emotion. The feeling is conveyed that this figure knows *more*, whether it is more than the other characters depicted, or simply more than a potential viewer of the work. As a *Pathosformel* carrying this intensity within it, Caravaggio could then take this form forward and allow the emotion within it to travel through his depiction of the *Magdalene*.

The fingers of Caravaggio's *Magdalene* (Fig. 95) lack the spasm of ecstasy or pain which inspires *Ludovica's* gesture of pressing her breast, or Guido Reni's *Magdalene* (Fig. 91) in her passionate prayer. The fingers are content to rest between each other. Following the line both of the swathe of cloth and of the tress of hair, the fingers provide another articulation of a multi-layered body where the interaction between inside and outside is not a violation but an exploration, inaccessible for a voyeur's gaze. Posèq's analysis of the



Fig. 94 – see ref. Fig. 27

painting missed the incongruous relaxation of the posture, which made Nisbet take notice of the *Taking of Christ* (Fig. 92). Mary Magdalene's ecstasy can encompass both abandonment and emotional spasm: it can cover both the melancholic and the ecstatic sides of Warburg's proposed schizophrenic dichotomy of visuality.

In Chapter One, via the metaphor of the mirror and the deconstruction of gaze networks around the depictions of the Magdalene, I suggested a space where the depicted body could become an ironic, since fictive, embodied site of knowledge. In the

second chapter, I described how the established structure of the fetishising gaze reduced the representation of the female body to a shell of inside and outside, only existing to be penetrated and annihilated, and that certain representations of ecstasy such as Bernini's *Teresa* and *Ludovica* participate in this phallogentric visuality by reinforcing a notion of the female body based on this very construct.

By proposing examples of articulations of the 'Caravaggesque' body expressed in these terms, and moving outside of the oeuvre of 'Caravaggio' to very disparate genres and contexts of visuality, in the rest of this chapter I can now shift this argument deeper within the signs, movements, and details of the depicted body, to show how the 'Caravaggesque' body may be able to articulate subjectivity by mastering and internalising, juxtaposing and merging, its own contradictions.

Appropriating the chair: hysteria and contradiction

Gentileschi's use of a formal, high backed chair in the composition of the *Magdalene* (Fig. 78) may owe something to the tradition of Raphael's iconic 1512 portrait of Pope Julius II (Fig. 96), specifically in her use of the chair to reinforce the mental authority of its apparently physically subdued occupant. Here, however, the portrait is

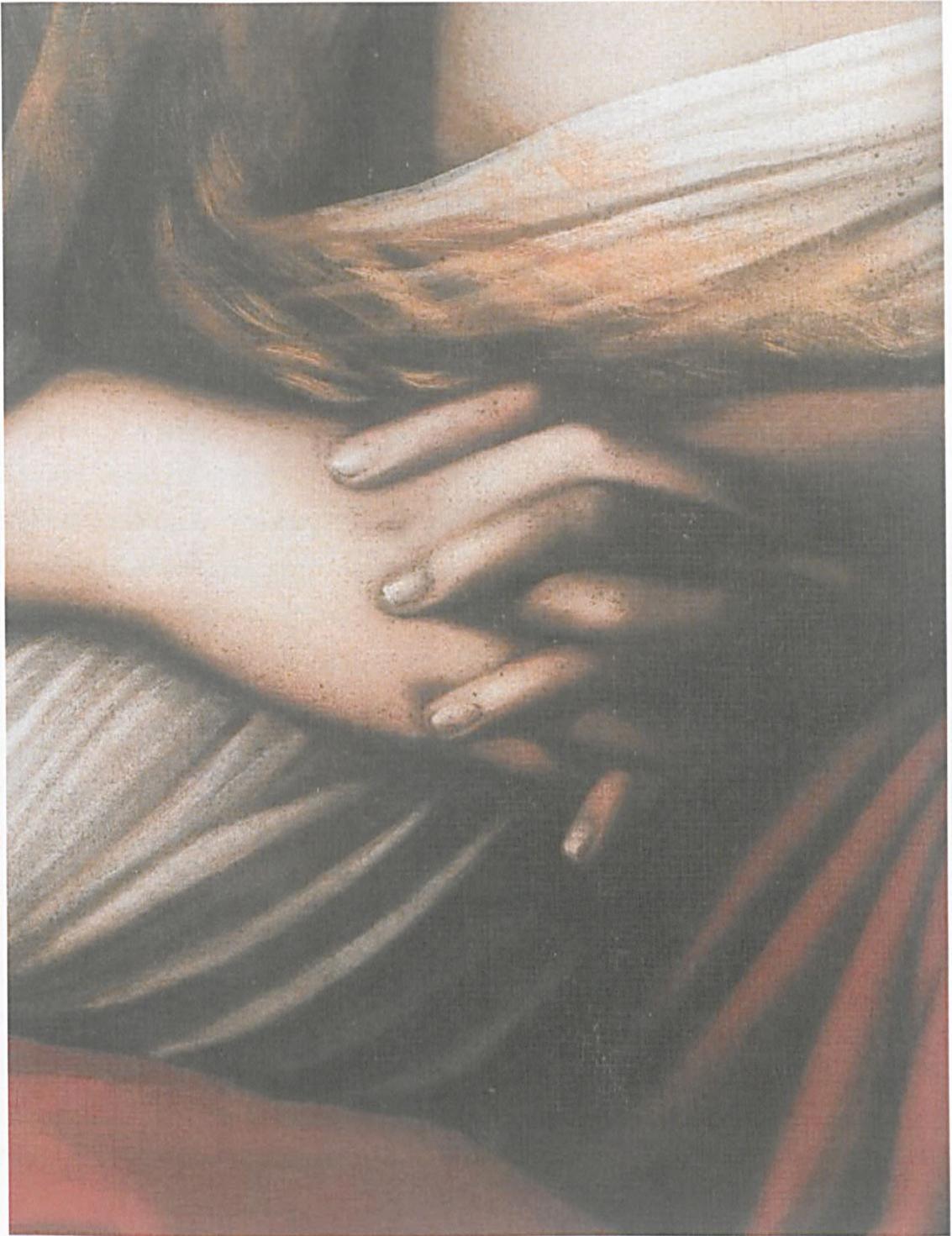


Fig. 95: Caravaggio, 'Magdalene (detail of hands)', Croce collection

adapted from a reinforcement of patriarchal authority to an evocation of a potency which is gendered female.

In the photograph in Fig. 97, another woman in another century uses another chair as a creative device. Here, however, the chair does not reinforce power but destabilises it. Only the twisting, contrapposto body of the young woman keeps the overbalancing chair upright. Perhaps seductively or coquettishly, she gazes provocatively at the camera. The process of looking, however, starts to make the balance seem precarious, the posture uncomfortable, the right hand oddly clenched. The caption explains: the girl's posture is due to a

paralysis and rigidity of the right side of her body as a result of a hysterical attack. She is Augustine, the most famous of the patients of doctor Charcot, whose mysterious gestures and poses during 'attacks' were showcased by the nineteenth century French physician in the publication *L'Iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière*.³² This extraordinary photographic document charts the often violent physical episodes undergone by the 'hysterics' at Paris's Salpêtrière hospital in the late nineteenth century. Augustine was the inmate of the Salpêtrière whose attacks were the most consistent, varied and abundant, and was therefore photographed so frequently as to become the archetypal hysterical body, at the core of nineteenth century visuality of the female body.

In 1908, Freud used the term 'contradictory simultaneity' to describe the behaviour of the Salpêtrière's inmates.³³ The nineteenth century was a moment in visual culture which brought into play specific dynamics of repression, power and sexuality.³⁴ The female body in visual representation, both as creative and created, as artist and as artwork, engages with



Fig. 96: Raphael, (Raffaello Sanzio), 'Portrait of Julius II', 1511-12, National Gallery, London



Fig. 97: Régnard, photograph of Augustine, 1875-80, *Iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière*, vol. II

and embodies contradictory simultaneity in the nineteenth century ‘moment’, but also forms a visual trace across seemingly disparate centuries and contexts.

Although hysteria as a condition has ancient origins, it reached a zenith at the heart of the work of Freud, and hence at the foundation of psychoanalysis.³⁵ Subsequent feminist research in particular tends to widen and deepen its origins. Martha Noel Edmunds’ and Elaine Showalter’s work shows how the traditional understanding of hysteria can be reinterpreted as an enactment of the suffering of the oppressed position of women within society.³⁶ Elisabeth Bronfen emphasises the way in which the hysteric body treads the fine line between ‘true being’ and ‘appearance’ in the sense in which the disorder imitates other diseases and conditions of the cultural context within which it is operating.³⁷

Juliet Mitchell explains how contradiction is inherently part of manifestations of hysterical symptoms since it is part of the fabric of the unconscious itself, as seen by Freudian scholars. She writes, “What would be contradictory ideas in conscious life can coexist simultaneously in unconscious processes: there is no ‘no’; nothing can be negated; one object/idea can stand in for many others or be displaced along a seemingly (but not actually) endless series of other manifestations.”³⁸

Sigrid Schade notes,

In his search for a psychology of human experience, Warburg came to recognise the stereotyping of memory images in gesture language in the history of art as the linguistic matter of a body language.³⁹

As Schade asserts, Aby Warburg’s work on gesture had strong parallels with the work of Dr. Charcot. Since a key definition of hysteria is that mental processes are translated into bodily symptoms, it is inevitably negotiated in visual terms. The meanings and associations which accrue to the dramatic poses and gestures of the patients are free-floating. Indeed, some of the ambiguous labels Charcot gave to the postures performed by the hysterics testify to the difficulty faced by doctors attempting to classify them into representations of different states or emotions. The captions include ‘threat’, ‘appeal’, ‘amorous supplication’, ‘eroticism’, ‘ecstasy’, ‘mockery’, ‘cry’, and ‘crucifixion’: a roll call of nineteenth century stereotypes for female ‘excessive’ behaviour. Charcot believed that these postures, which he called the *attitudes passionnelles*, were delusionary manifestations of the passions or emotions hidden in the patient’s psychic life. A Warburgian approach structured around the *pathos formula* and the interdiscursivity of the Mnemosyne Atlas provides a structure to think through the relationships between the

visualities at play here, whether mystic, hysteric, or artistic. There is no need to reductively ‘diagnose’, or equate one state or network of visibility to another, since thinking the images through a Warburgian visual analysis permits all such images to be considered as interventions in visual culture which have the potential to bear traces of whatever specific ‘bewegte Beiwerke’ carry any given meaning and emotion.

The advent of photography gave the nineteenth century doctors of hysteria the illusion of being able to visually contain and document this mysterious condition: curing or treating the inmates of the hospital became secondary to the photographic project. The drive to organise and classify the images – reminiscent also of Warburg’s great library project – is an attempt to regulate hysteria itself, and thereby visually control an unruly female body.⁴⁰

The physical and the spiritual body

We have already seen the simultaneous contradiction at work in baroque images of religious ecstasy. Moshe Barasch wonders that Bernini’s *Teresa* can incorporate a potentially ‘blasphemous use of the erotic climax as an image of *unio mystica*.’⁴¹ It is interesting that Barasch’s identification of the specific meaning of the expressions of the two women (‘erotic climax’ and ‘unio mystica’ could be labels of Charcot’s *Iconographie*) turns on the contradictory simultaneity of activity or climax, with passivity.

In Bernini’s *St. Teresa* but also in the later sculpture *Ludovica Albertoni* (Fig. 3), ‘contradictory simultaneity’ is manifest in the simultaneous tension and abandon, force and helplessness of the marble bodies, with their astonishing billowing drapery. Giovanni Careri writes:



Fig. 98 – see ref. Fig. 1

Ludovica's body writhes with the convulsions produced upon her 'real' body by the spiritual experience she is undergoing, yet at the same time she has assumed the pose of her 'imaginary' body's sensual self-surrender to the divine lover.⁴²

The spiritual body's pleasure is imprinted upon the physical body's pain, as Ludovica is reputedly depicted by Bernini as dying in ecstasy. Careri's problematic use of the word 'real' is interesting. His analysis of the sculpture inadvertently sets up a dynamic of real and imaginary, layer upon layer of body and reality which pile up around the imagined woman at its centre, rather like the folds of Ludovica's robe engulf the marble body which the gaze has fantasised into existence beneath the marble fabric.

In effect the 'real' Ludovica is not one but multiple: depicted in her ecstatic state she has become a complex entity of many bodies, many layers. The sculpture in its ambiguity encourages multiplicity of meaning while confounding and confusing attempts to pin it down, but at the same time, in the uncompromising paradox it makes of her body, condemns Ludovica to constant ecstasy, static, yet oscillating in the border space between bodies, both frozen and liquid.

Photography, truth and nature

The solidity of sculpted marble suspends Ludovica's body in three-dimensional materiality. In the nineteenth century, however, photography was the 'new' visual medium: the photographic image purported to represent the truth, and Charcot credited it with complete authority:

Behold the truth... It would be truly fantastic if I could create ailments as my whim or fancy dictate. But, truth to tell, in this I am nothing more than a photographer; I inscribe what I see...⁴³

H. W. Diamond, the first photographer of madness in Surrey in 1856, wrote that 'the photographer needs in many cases no aid from any language of his own, but prefers rather to listen, with the picture before him, to the silent but telling language of Nature'.⁴⁴ The Salpêtrière photographer Albert Londe uses a visual rather than linguistic metaphor: 'the photographic plate is the scientist's true retina'.⁴⁵

Looking back from a twentieth century standpoint, Mady Schutzman traces the insidious connections between hysteria itself and the nature of the photograph in her book *The Real Thing*, noting how the hysteric's body, like the photograph, is a 'living paradox': 'Its oscillation between convulsive freezing and fluid recycling, between inclusion and

exclusion, links woman to photography: she *lives* the symbolic dying and rebirthing that distinguishes the photographic message.⁴⁶

As well as referring to the deadly power of the photograph, Schutzman's connection between photography and the hysterical body refers to a specifically temporal phenomenon which the two have in common – the 'frozen' nature of the photographic image and of the body of the hysteric in its rigid posture – and which result in a distorted relation to reality.⁴⁷

In *The Threshold of the Visible World* Kaja Silverman deconstructs the photograph and the fiction of its 'realism'. Part of her argument refers to a 1988 film by Harun Farocki. The voice-over in Farocki's film stresses the temporal nature of the photograph, which, '...captures the moment and thus crops away past and future'. Silverman concludes that 'photography intervenes in a real in which it paradoxically cannot participate, a real which it can, in fact, only work to derealise. It is, consequently, precisely an antirealist representational system.'⁴⁸

Photography therefore came to form the visual structure through which hysteria was negotiated, its own distortions and paradoxes mirroring those of the condition itself. Carol Armstrong remarks:

Each convulsion of the hysterical body, face, limb, and/or entire frame made a tableau, a kind of living sculpture, in which the subject was simultaneously hypercontracted and cataleptic, ultramobile and immobilized: a photograph before it was photographed, in short.⁴⁹

The paradoxical temporality of the photographs of the hysterics, poised frozen in the midst of drama, logically indicates film. The photographs masquerade as film stills.

Cindy Sherman's film stills

Cindy Sherman's famous series of photographs from the late nineteen seventies also masquerade as film stills. Each of the seventy images in the series from Sherman's early career is simply called *Untitled Film Still*, with a number. The photographs are celebrated by some as a visual debate on the place of the individual within culture and civilisation, but feminist critics in particular see her work particularly as a debate on the nature of femininity and its relation to masquerade and the gaze.⁵⁰ Each tableau represents Sherman herself in the guise of an actress, performing in a film of which every cinematic detail, lighting, set, costume, culturally marks the period (1950s or 60s), as well as the woman herself; she is carefully 'framed' in each shot.

One of Sherman's masterstrokes in several photographs of this series, although this is not necessarily the emphasis in the majority, is the sense that despite the temporary stasis or peace of the character, the image is imbued with what has been, and what will be. These images are not films but specifically *film stills*: the poses and expressions of the women are heavy with their own fictive past and future. Mary Garrard finds a similar quality in Artemisia Gentileschi's *Magdalene* (Fig. 78):

Her red and swollen eyes imply that she has been grieving, but they now are partly open, with a fixed stare. The image of a figure in transition, opening eyes swollen from crying, is a master stroke.⁵¹

Sherman's twentieth century photographs occurred within a context where artists and their critics might be expected to be beginning to be aware of mechanisms of the gaze and the gendered politics of viewing. Gentileschi's painting, three hundred years prior, nonetheless invokes similar dynamics. The anticipation of passion is contained within the still figure of the saint, poised between pain and pleasure: emotions and tensions progressively dawn as the gradual process of viewing unfolds. This subtle temporality is achieved within the deceptive stillness of this single painting and the way it manipulates the gaze.⁵²

Many of Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* work in a similar way. In Still #10 (Fig. 99), for instance, a black-haired woman in the kitchen, wearing black boots, a miniskirt and a coat across her shoulders, reaches down towards a paper shopping bag which has fallen and spilled its contents on the ground. There is a studied air of the 1960s, a domestic scene filled with tension which might spill over into an argument. Like all the photographs in the series the woman's facial expression is masterfully indefinite, poised between anger, scorn and apathy. Then we realise that she is not only picking up the shopping which has fallen on the ground but she is holding a box of eggs – and obviously they must be broken.

It is a small but sharp human detail which relies on identification to function. Looking back at the woman's gaze, new expectations and responses begin to crowd in: the viewer provides the rest of the 'film'.⁵³ This temporal manipulation establishes an authorial manipulative presence, as it makes the viewing process conscious.



Fig. 99: Cindy Sherman, 1970s, 'Untitled Film Still #10', Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, New York

A living work of art: contradiction and performance

Hysteria is seen as a profoundly mimetic disorder, with symptoms compulsively adapting to and referencing the immediate environment. The fact that the hysterics' postures froze rigidly for minutes at a time perhaps suggests that they were conforming to the desires of the doctors in terms of nineteenth century photography's slow shutter speeds. Augustine's symptoms continued to 'appear', to the satisfaction of Charcot and his colleagues, and the requirements of their photographic technique. The doctors nevertheless played increasingly directive roles with respect to their 'masterpieces', provoking certain postures and grimaces which had already occurred in private during spontaneous attacks, for the purposes of photography or public lectures. They would often do this by hypnosis, but also by shocking the hysterics with bright lights or noises, literally creating the symptom the patient had supposedly been admitted to cure. They would also physically manipulate the bodies of the hysterics during an attack. The *Iconographie* relates:

[Augustine]... fell asleep again. Her head is pressed against the back of a chair, then the muscles of her back, thighs and legs are rubbed, and her feet are placed on a second chair: the rigid body remains in this position for a rather long time... it is possible to place a weight of 40 kilograms on the stomach without causing the body to bend... [Augustine]... is put to sleep by surprise... The body can be positioned in an arc.⁵⁴

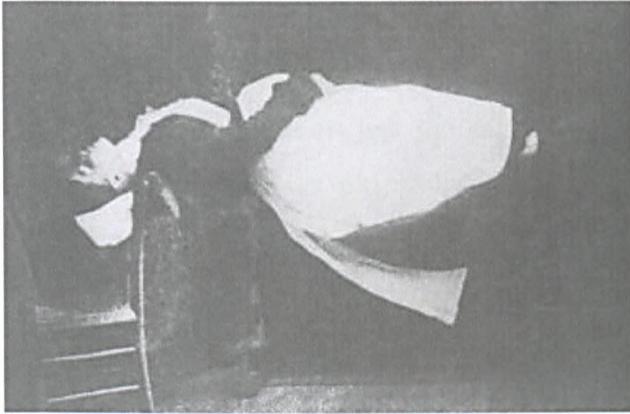


Fig. 100: Régnard, photograph of Augustine, *Iconographie de la Salpêtrière*, vol. III



Fig. 101: Régnard, photograph of Augustine, *Iconographie de la Salpêtrière*, vol. III

Didi-Huberman expresses it, ‘...a hysteric can be a living work of art, and I will continue to speak of Augustine as a masterpiece, the masterpiece and ‘thing’ of her physicians.’⁵⁵

The ecstatic bodies of the medieval Christian mystics were exploited in the same way. In an essay entitled ‘*Dominae or Dominatae?*’ Dyan Elliott recounts how the confessor of Frances of Rome, John Mattiotti, would physically demonstrate Frances’s ecstatic state to onlookers:

John told her spiritual daughter Rita ‘to torture her harshly’. Rita used all the force she could muster in an effort to separate Frances’s hands, which were habitually joined when she was in this state... In another instance, John caused several of the sisters to poke her in the face, which still elicited no response.⁵⁶

Elliott gives yet more examples: ‘Skeptics stabbed the enrapt Christine of Stommeln with scissors, while Charles of Anjou poured molten lead over the feet of the immobilized Douceline of Marseilles.’⁵⁷

Elisabeth of Spaalbeek was a medieval mystic, whose life, like many others of her kind, was closely supervised by male intermediaries. Elisabeth’s cousin, the abbot of Sint-Truiden, as well as stage-managing her public ecstasies and mystical experiences, encouraged audience participation. Elisabeth liked to gaze at a painting representing Christ. The text of her *Life* relates:

And in the intervals of those ecstasies, her fingers hold the picture so tightly that if anyone shakes; moves, or pulls it, as though to take it away by force, it cannot be

separated from her, but her whole body is moved with the movement of the picture.⁵⁸

The text continues to describe how Elisabeth stands rigidly in the form of a cross, and 'if at any time the little finger of her right hand is touched, the fingers of her other hand and her whole body move in just the same way.'⁵⁹ The abbot must have invited those witnessing her ecstasies to physically test her. Elizabeth Spearing concludes, 'he is presenting a performance that he has helped create'.⁶⁰

The performance of these paradoxical bodies is suspended between active and passive. These women's bodies at once subject to the male intermediary between them and the audience, and to the mysterious force, whether divine or psychological, which was avowed to be at the root of this spectacular behaviour.

The bodies may have been subject to different external forces, but the performance itself remained utterly autonomous. The implied passivity of the descriptions above masks what is in fact a highly ambiguous performance of pain and pleasure. The Life of Elisabeth of Spaalbeek recounts how Elisabeth hit and wounded her own body, stabbing her eyes with her fingers and pulling her own hair, and concludes:

... in a new and unheard of manner she enacts in herself both the part of the suffering Christ and the part of the tormenting enemy, she represents the person of our Lord while she suffers, and of the enemy while she pulls, drags, strikes, or threatens.⁶¹

Freud's phrase 'contradictory simultaneity' originated in his description of a hysteric who seems to be adopting precisely this two-gendered position:

...in a case I observed, ...the patient holds her gown against her body with one hand (as the woman) and tries to tear it off with the other (as the man). This contradictory simultaneity is ...extremely well suited to veiling the unconscious phantasy that is at work.⁶²

In Georges Didi-Huberman's book *Invention of Hysteria* we find the same theme recurring in his description of Augustine's sexually provocative behaviour during her attacks, referring to the rape which may have triggered her condition.

...in this repetition of the rape, Augustine did not only play her 'own' role, which would have been pain or mere 'passivity'. She merged her own suffering with the aggressive act, she would also play the assaulting body, and her fear was overtaken by a kind of intense satisfaction - an autoerotic satisfaction. ...This merging is ...a veritable feat of theatricality: *two bodies in one*. (my emphasis)⁶³

Just as the visual representations of these ecstatic and hysteric bodies encapsulate a multiple temporality, the dichotomy of active and passive being played out in the context of

the public performance is echoed within the body itself. The medieval female mystics acted within and undermined the restrictive tropes of the body, as Laurie Finke points out: 'the discourse of the female mystic was constructed out of disciplines designed to regulate the female body, and it is, paradoxically, through these disciplines that the mystic consolidated her power... [and] fashioned... the means of transcending [her] own secondariness.'⁶⁴

In these dual bodily performances of violation, the pain of the violated body is equated to the pleasure of the violator. Some theorists argue that each cancels the other out; rather than two bodies existing in one, nothing remains. A hysteric is unable to represent his or her own body, which results in emptiness, leading to obsessive multiple identification. Mady Schutzman characterizes the hysterical choice as 'no-body or all-body', and her thesis rests on the way in which today's advertising imagery forces a continuation of hysteria up to the present day. Advertising encourages tropes of feminine masquerade which women can subvert by means of a generalized hysteria, voluntarily assuming the multiple tropes. Here Cindy Sherman's multiple 'characters' in her film stills are held up as an exemplar of a transgressive one-up-man-ship with respect to the hysterical advertising industry.

Schutzman's argument is compelling but it is worth remembering, as Catherine Clément points out in her debate with Hélène Cixous, that hysteria is the predicament of women in society.⁶⁵ Taking hysteria as a mode of response to patriarchy involves assuming and adopting an identity of psychical suffering and problematically negotiated femininity. There is perhaps a more immediate visual imperative, in a world where the female body is first visually negotiated for many young people through pornography, to draw attention instead to the way in which, in practice, a simultaneous contradictory performance of pleasure and pain is interpreted in the patriarchal gaze framework.

Didi-Huberman articulates the strange fascination of hysteria precisely in terms of its contradictory simultaneity of pleasure and pain:

...a physician finds it impossible not to observe, as an artist, the luxurious pain of a body in the throes of its symptoms. Nor can I myself escape this paradox of atrocity, for I am nearly compelled to consider hysteria... as a chapter in the history of art.⁶⁶

Carol Armstrong, in her review of Didi-Huberman's book, pinpoints what Didi-Huberman himself has realised in this extract when she remarks upon:

...the very same prurient enchantment that seems to have infected Charcot and his prepsychoanalytic brethren, and that passes itself on to any like-minded reader of *Invention of Hysteria*. (I myself fell prey to it.)⁶⁷

The undecidable female body between pleasure and pain amasses around it opposing interpretations and motivations. The sexual fascination provoked by the compelling figure of the young Augustine and persuasively constructed into mythological status by Didi-Huberman is mirrored by responses to Artemisia Gentileschi's *Magdalene* (Fig. 78).

R. Ward Bissell sees the saint as 'vulnerable', 'provocative', 'tantalising', and 'enticing due to the slipping of the gown at her shoulder, which, he says 'might continue [its] fall.'⁶⁸ Mary Garrard, however, reads the saint not as provocative but as abused:

I would argue that this slipped chemise and partially exposed breast indeed refer to the Magdalen's erotic past, yet not as sinner but as sexually abused woman. She has clearly not arranged herself to titillate: rather, her dishevelled appearance is one of those trace elements – a pure Peircian index – that points to what has come before. It is a vestige of her rough sexual handling by men, a signifier of her consequent abject, debased state.⁶⁹

Avigdor Posèq concludes in his 1991 essay on Caravaggio's *Magdalene* (Fig. 27) that the painting represents a 'spiritually ravished Magdalene, modelled on a mythological victim of rape', specifically on antique figures such as Ariadne and Niobe.⁷⁰ Problematically, here, a raped body is not, as it was for Garrard, an abused and abjected body. Indeed from the standpoint of traditional art historical concerns of provenance and influence, rape develops a noble quality, admired as part of the iconographic heritage of antique art. Debasement and elevation are simultaneous, just as the folds of *Ludovica's* garment weigh down and uplift her at once tensed and abandoned body.⁷¹

A body at once provocative and abused is perhaps the archetypal body of hysteria: simultaneously containing the Magdalene's past and future, her desire and her suffering, but also both her true self and the fictional identity, the redeemed prostitute, with which her undecidable body has been *mise-en-scène* in popular culture.

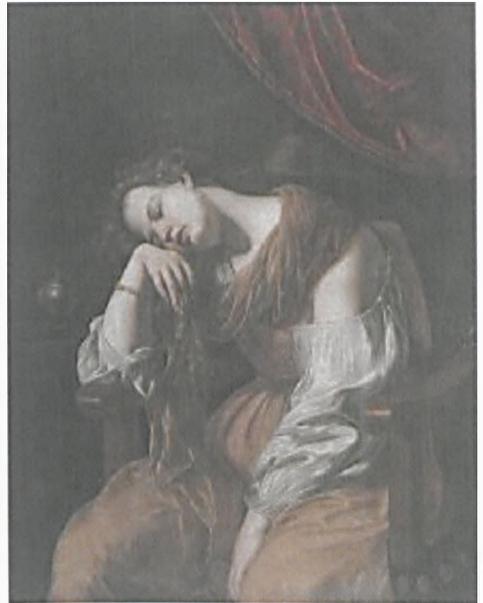


Fig. 102 – see ref. Fig. 78

Elisabeth, Augustine: performance artists?

Bodies depicted in an intermediary state between pleasure and pain challenge and disconcert a gaze which is determined to know and categorise the experience. In the same way, Cindy Sherman's most iconic *Film Stills* are those where the bodies are suspended in



Fig. 103: Cindy Sherman, 'Untitled Film Still #6'

time and in meaning; not only pleasure and pain, seductive or violated, but even life and death hang in the balance (Fig. 103). The temporal play within the image as a fictive 'film still' implicates the viewer's own desire and imposes his or her participation, whether the individual finds that implication or identification to be uncomfortable or liberating.

Where Schutzman saw the body of the hysteric as an ironic critique of society, a paradoxical mode of discourse which today's women wield as critical power through complicity with the fictive performance, some theorists ascribe similar significance to the

Christian mystics. Elisabeth Spearing seems to indicate a similar idea when she describes Elisabeth of Spaalbeek's ecstatic bodily performance as 'performance art':

Elisabeth has gained this power and control, and is drawing pilgrims from far and wide, through performance. She lives a daily routine of performance art, which is at the same time religious ritual. She is actor, dancer, gymnast, and priest... [she] is circumventing the problem of women being forbidden to take on the priestly role: the watchers are both audience and congregation.⁷²

The relationship between the hysterics and their doctors in the Salpêtrière was also a complex one. Didi-Huberman depicts Augustine as a 'masterpiece' and 'thing', the victim of the manipulation of the doctors.⁷³ Elisabeth Bronfen traces a more subtle degree of give and take, constructing the relationship more in terms of a power game:

If, to a degree, Charcot used his patients as mediums for his nosological phantasy, manipulating them into offering a perfect representation of the phases and stigmata of hysteria to prove the accuracy of his nosological graphs, the hysterics also manipulated their interpellator, making him part of their performances, the medium

for discovering ever new transformations for hysteric symptoms... analyst and patient come to instrumentalize each other and mutually support the implicated mise-en-scène of desire.⁷⁴

Elizabeth Spearing is also concerned to issue a caveat even as she describes the 'performance art' of the young mystic Elisabeth of Spaalbeek. Whatever the potential power and influence of the young woman upon her watchers may have been, her life remained disturbingly public, her body in its various ecstasies constantly visually available:

...the text seems pervaded by a sense of unease. There is tension between private reclusion and public spectacle, clean and unclean, body and spirit, energy and weakness. This is partly the effect of the performance; men are watching women, watching some moments which should be intimate. ...There is a central tension between the sacred and the profane.⁷⁵

There is a tragic irony in Elisabeth's partial victory, just like the irony and tragedy of the images I started with. Gentileschi's *Magdalene* (Fig. 78), while on the one hand a mentally powerful woman who luxuriates in her role as the symbol of melancholic creativity, is simultaneously caught in her own mythology and iconography as the erotic penitent whose past sexual life, in the popular myth of the Magdalene, dogs the strong identity with which the artist endows her. Augustine in the photograph from the *Iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière* (Fig. 97) undermines the very purpose of the photographic archive. Taunting the doctors, her body is detached from iconographic categorisation, defying the camera's relentlessness. All the while, nevertheless, she is paradoxically a captive of Charcot's systemising gaze.

Cindy Sherman wrote the following commentary about her *Untitled Film Stills*:

I suppose unconsciously, or semiconsciously at best, I was wrestling with some sort of turmoil of my own about understanding women... They were women struggling with something but I didn't know what... I wasn't working with a raised 'awareness', but I definitely felt that the characters were questioning something – perhaps being forced into a certain role.

At the same time, those roles are in a film: the women aren't being lifelike, they're acting. There are so many levels of artifice. I liked that whole jumble of ambiguity.⁷⁶

The uncertainty of Sherman's self-presentation as both artist and actress reflects the uncertainty of bodies which are at once one and multiple. Women forced into a certain role,



Fig. 104 – see ref. Fig. 97

from Elisabeth of Spaalbeek to Augustine, may struggle and question that role: simultaneous pleasure and pain may be part of the condition of what it is to be a woman in society, and perhaps what hysteric and ecstatic bodies do is to visually figure that struggle. In that sense, their position is suspended between victory and defeat.

Subjectivity beyond a dualist body structure

As in most documented experiences of religious ecstasy, the body is perceived as being acted upon by the divine force: a troublingly passive model. It appears however that bodies operating within the predetermined forms and codes of patriarchal visuality may achieve a form of subjective articulation and autonomy. The paradox of 'simultaneous contradiction' is a double-edged sword. On the one hand subjectivity can be articulated through the incongruous signs of strangeness, such as the intertwined fingers of Caravaggio's *Magdalene* (Fig. 27), which enable the articulation of thought and presence within the depicted figure via precisely that juxtaposition. What is lacking, however, is a model to escape completely from binary modes of thinking, rather than reuniting them in simultaneous contradiction (where both elements survive unchanged in the process, albeit negotiated in interaction with one another), but to restructure notions of the body so that it is no longer thought in binary terms: something akin to Elizabeth Grosz's agenda of,

problematizing and rethinking the relations between the inside and the outside of the subject, its psychical interior and its corporeal exterior, by showing not their fundamental identity or reducibility but the torsion of the one into the other, the passage, vector, or uncontrollable drift of the inside into the outside and the outside into the inside.⁷⁷

Grosz notes how even those concepts of the body which consider it as a conduit for thought, for instance, participate in the conception of the body as a passive surface for inscription. She writes, 'Insofar as feminist theory uncritically takes over these common assumptions, it participates in the social devaluing of the body that goes hand in hand with the oppression of women.'⁷⁸ Criticising models of corporeality which consign the body to the role of 'a signifying medium, a vehicle for expression', she wishes to 'displace the centrality of mind, the psyche, interior, or consciousness... through a reconfiguration of the body.'⁷⁹ Through interpretations of the work of Spinoza and Deleuze, Grosz argues for a body conceived following the structure of the Möbius strip (see Fig. 105):

The Möbius strip model has the advantage of showing that there can be a relation between two “things” – mind and body – which presumes neither their identity nor their radical disjunction, a model which shows that while there are disparate “things” being related, they have the capacity to twist one into the other... It enables subjectivity to be understood not as the combination of a psychical depth and a corporeal superficiality but as a surface whose inscriptions and rotations in three dimensional space produce all the effects of depth.⁸⁰

An alternative concept which Grosz might have considered is the Klein bottle, a conceptual four-dimensional figure developed in the field of topology, which is visualised by a three-dimensional shape; itself able to be represented,

via perspective, in a two-dimensional plane (Fig. 106). Felix Klein’s original conception for the bottle, which he developed in 1882, was as a shape where ‘outside and inside meet’.⁸¹ Mathematician Konrad Polthier summarises; ‘The bottle is a one-sided surface - like the

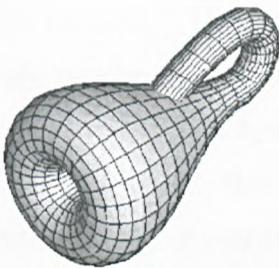


Fig. 106: Two dimensional representation of a Klein bottle



Fig. 107: Cliff Stoll, Glass Klein Bottles (3-dimensional representation)

well known Möbius band - but is even more fascinating, since it is closed and has no border and neither an enclosed interior nor exterior...’ and, unlike a torus or ‘doughnut’ form, ‘the Klein bottle does not bound a volume - in other words, it has no interior.’⁸²

The Klein bottle is literally and mathematically all-surface. The philosophical enigma posed by this hypothetical form brings into focus the play of concepts in the artworks which I argued in a previous chapter maintain a fetishistic visuality: there is no interior, it is all surface. However, the concept also opens up new possibilities. The bottle cannot ‘contain’ - yet it is still a ‘bottle’. The notion that a bottle does not have to contain, might open up a space where skin does not

have to contain. Another description of a Klein bottle reads, ‘Its inside is its outside. It contains itself...’⁸³

Both mathematical models, while attractive, are also problematic metaphors for the body. Their abstraction, since their visual and material manifestations are merely



Fig. 105: M. C. Escher, ‘Möbius Strip II’, 1963

theoretical, is problematically negative. As a philosophical model their use may be possible, but in visuality it is a powerless analogy. Neither can replicate the dimensionality of painting and sculpture, which are themselves materially constituted while simultaneously offering the possibility of patterning a non-binary concept of the body.

Fire as bodily metaphor

Another metaphor which Grosz suggests, but which she does not follow up further, is that of fire. She cites Hans Jonas on Spinoza:

As in a burning candle, the permanence of the flame is permanence, not of substance but of process in which at each moment the “body” with its “structure” of inner and outer layers is reconstituted of materials different from the previous and following ones so the living organism exists as a constant exchange of its own constituents and has its permanence and identity in the continuity of this process.⁸⁴

Studying the paradoxical body through the imagery of fire and flame may provide a way to think through not only the experience of ecstasy, but also the meaning of a bodily ecstatic ‘passivity’. The metaphor of fire may provide a way of speaking the body which not only escapes from the inside/outside dichotomy at the heart of these arguments in visuality, but also the binary oppositions at work throughout the representation of the female body. Not only that, but outside of abstract philosophical or theoretical articulations, fire has been used repeatedly within culture to conceptualise the materiality of the body.

Hildegard of Bingen, a medieval writer, philosopher and visionary, repeatedly referred to the body in ecstasy in terms of fire and flame:

...When I was forty-two years and seven months old, Heaven was opened and a fiery light of exceeding brilliance came and permeated my whole brain, and inflamed my whole heart and my whole breast, not like a burning but like a warming flame, as the sun warms anything its rays touch. And immediately I knew the meaning of the exposition of the Scriptures...⁸⁵

Hildegard left a vivid and eloquent textual record of her visions but we also have vivid manuscript illustrations which accompany them – in an extraordinary medieval illustration (Fig. 108) the flames which Hildegard describes as bringing this sudden theological understanding to her descend from the architectural vault of heaven and lick around her face, eyes and forehead.⁸⁶

The motif of fire and flame is to be found throughout Hildegard's writings and art as well as playing a key role in her theology. Later in the same text (the 'Scivias') she recounts a vision where the story of creation is seen as a flame. Whereas for Hildegard fire represented, among other things, knowledge or creation, for saints and mystics as the centuries progressed, it acquired new and varied meanings. It is however Hildegard's own profoundly bodily conception of the flame of creation which ultimately provides us with a medieval model for the transgression in terms of the body which I will argue that the metaphor of flame paradoxically enables.⁸⁷

These transgressive potentialities inherent in the way the divine is constructed within

Christianity are activated in the state of ecstasy, first by the saints themselves in their descriptions of ecstatic experiences, but also in the trace religious ecstasy has left upon Western visual culture up to the present day.

The concept of fire in the Old and New Testaments

In the Judeo-Christian scriptures, fire is very often the manifested form of God and in particular of the Holy Spirit. From the burning bush which spoke to Moses,⁸⁸ to the flames which conferred knowledge upon the Apostles at Pentecost,⁸⁹ to the devastating power of the rain of flame which destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah,⁹⁰ fire could represent diverse and indeed opposing aspects of divine power, from benevolence to ruthlessness. A key dichotomy along similar lines is seen clearly in the declaration of St. John the Baptist: 'I baptise you with water... but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; ... he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.'⁹¹ Here, in the context of the baptismal rite, fire is constructed as having a dual role. Baptism as purification is both destruction and creation – a rebirth or resurrection. Fire is the ultimate purifier as, unlike



Fig. 108: Manuscript illustration, 'Liber Scivias', copy of the former Rupertsberg Codex, c. 1180; St Hildegard's Abbey, Eibingen

water, it consumes and annihilates; a Biblical metaphor of danger as well as beneficence which appropriately symbolises an Old Testament concept of God. However, the motif of fire in St. John's statement is operating at the heart of the New Testament concept of the Trinity. In John the Baptist's model of baptism the unearthly form of the Holy Spirit, the animate yet intangible flame, is here wielded by Jesus, God incarnate in a human form. Baptism therefore, the act performed upon the body which effects the rebirth of the soul, is carried out precisely by this strikingly polarised spirit/body construct.

Indeed the Old and New Testaments differ profoundly in the way in which they structure mankind's bodily relationship with God. The bodiless God in the Old Testament is explicitly and repeatedly represented as fire. For Elaine Scarry, fire is a weapon, the method via which God becomes manifest. She aligns fire structurally with storm, plague, the arrow and the sword as a 'path of connection' between a disembodied God and the human body: "at one terminus it is ignited and at the other it burns".⁹² It seems to me however that fire in the Old Testament is more particularly used in order to emphasise that the divine has no physical form and therefore cannot be represented:

Then the Lord spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice... Since you saw no form when the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire, take care and watch yourselves closely so that you do not act corruptly by making an idol for yourselves...⁹³

God as flame therefore requires a material (and often strikingly mundane) object as 'host', such as the flaming torch and pot of Genesis 15, or the burning bush of Exodus.⁹⁴

Elaine Scarry notes how the interaction between the disembodied God and man is represented in terms of a violent penetration of the physical human body. Resistance to God's command in the Old Testament is therefore expressed in terms of a hardening and closing of the body as if to refuse to allow God's penetration into the body's interior:

But they refused to listen, and turned a stubborn shoulder, and stopped their ears in order not to hear. They made their hearts adamant lest they should hear the law... (Zechariah 7:11, 12)

They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to turn back. (Jeremiah 5:3)

They turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey. (Nehemiah 9:29)

Because I know that you are obstinate, and your neck is an iron sinew, and your forehead brass. (Isaiah 48:4)⁹⁵

Scarry remarks how 'the withholding of the body... necessitates God's forceful shattering of the reluctant human surface and repossession of the interior.'⁹⁶ The offer of the interior of the body to be 'repossessed' is indeed the ultimate Old Testament proof of belief, found in the story of Abraham and Isaac: 'the taking of one's insides and giving them over to something wholly outside oneself, as Abraham agrees to sacrifice the interior of his and Sarah's bodies [Isaac].'⁹⁷

In the New Testament the bodily concept of God is revolutionised by the humanity of Jesus. Here it is God who surrenders his own bodily interior, in the scene in John chapter 20 verse 27, where Jesus invites the disbelieving Thomas to 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.'⁹⁸ Again the offer of the body is a test of faith. The New Testament God not only offers the interior of the body to be penetrated but submits himself to a very human and bodily suffering on the Cross.

This opposition in the relationship between the divine and the bodily in the imagery of the Bible is, as we have seen, echoed in the symbolism of baptism, where fire is the medium by which this juxtaposition is negotiated. Baptism itself embodies the negation of simultaneous creation and destruction, death and rebirth. It is these juxtapositions and paradoxes lying dormant at the heart of Christianity which the mystics activate during ecstasy.

The fire of love in the visions of the great Christian mystics

Sixteenth-century mystic Teresa of Avila's famous account of a vision during ecstasy, which formed the basis of her canonisation as well as inspiring Bernini's sculpture in Santa Maria della Vittoria (Fig. 109), has fire imagery at its centre. She writes:

I would see beside me, on my left hand, an angel in bodily form... his face so aflame that he appeared to be one of the highest types of angel who seem to be all afire. ...In his hands I saw a long golden spear and at the end of the iron tip I seemed to see a point of fire. With this he seemed to pierce my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails. When he drew it out, I thought he was drawing them out with it and he left me completely afire with a great love for God.⁹⁹

Teresa's preoccupation with trying to define the nature of the experience between bodily and spiritual can be found throughout her writings. She writes that in the highest form of auditory 'vision', "the words are perfectly formed, but are not heard with the physical ear."¹⁰⁰ For Teresa, whereas the highest ecstasy is not perceived by the bodily

senses, it does dramatically affect the physical body:

The entire body contracts: neither foot nor arm can be moved. If one is standing at the time, one falls into a sitting position as though transported, and cannot even take a breath. One only utters a few slight moans, not aloud, for that is impossible, but inwardly, out of pain.¹⁰¹

This concern for the nature of bodily experience is echoed throughout the writings of the mystics from medieval times. Margery Kempe, writing in the fifteenth century, insists on the participation of the physical senses:

...the Father of Heaven conversed with her soul as plainly and as certainly as one friend speaks to another through bodily speech. ...she heard with her bodily ears... she saw with her bodily eyes...¹⁰²

The most emphatically bodily sensation experienced by Margery, however, is the ‘fire of love’:

Our Lord also gave her another token which lasted about sixteen years, and increased ever more and more, and that was a flame of fire of love – marvellously hot and delectable and very comforting, never diminishing but ever increasing; for though the weather were never so cold she felt the heat burning in her breast and at her heart, as veritably as a man would feel the material fire if he put his hand or his finger into it.

When she first felt the fire of love burning in her breast she was afraid of it, and then our Lord answered in her mind and said, ‘Daughter, don’t be afraid, because this heat is the heat of the Holy Ghost, which will burn away all your sins, for the fire of love quenches all sins.’¹⁰³

Both Margery’s and Teresa’s accounts of divine fire contain a combination of sensations, fear and pain alongside acceptance and pleasure. In both accounts the flame is imposed from the outside, but burns deep inside the saint’s body. While Teresa often associates her experience of ‘receiving’ God with the unbearable intensity of being at the point of death (hence her famous phrase ‘I am dying from not dying’), Margery explicitly associates the flame with the purifying fire of the Holy Spirit – in a sense, the experience of the moment of spiritual baptism, the death and rebirth signified by the consuming power of the flame.



Fig. 109 – see ref. Fig. 1

Throughout their ecstasy but in particular in the experience of ecstatic fire, the mystics combine within their own bodies the two forms of divinity which we have seen structure the concept of the divine in the Old and New Testaments. On the one hand their bodies become the passive receptacles of a divine imposition and penetration, while on the other, they re-enact the suffering of Christ through various forms of self-harm. This precise paradox can be subtly seen at work in the text of Margery Kempe, where the sensation of fire penetrating within her chest is equated to the sensation of a man deliberately ‘penetrating’ a fire, with a hand or finger. Active and passive become conflated in this discourse, as during ecstasy the mystic submits and surrenders to God, a discourse structured around the body as ‘done-to’ or acted upon.

In art representing the done-to bodies of ecstatic saints, we find that the visual tropes needed to transgress the boundaries of the bodily and the spiritual, also transgressed the boundary between the erotic and the sacred. An explanation provided by Giovanni Careri maintains that Bernini, conceiving of Ludovica’s dying ecstasy as the union of the spiritual body of the saint with the spiritual body of Christ, depicted in the sculpture a combination of sensations of agony of the physical body with the sensual abandon of the spiritual body meeting the ‘bridegroom’ as inspired by imagery from the Song of Songs. Careri writes:

Bernini has hit upon a synthesis of these two extremes: Ludovica’s body writhes with the convulsions produced upon her ‘real’ body by the spiritual experience she is undergoing, yet at the same time she has assumed the pose of her ‘imaginary’ body’s sensual self-surrender to the divine lover.¹⁰⁴

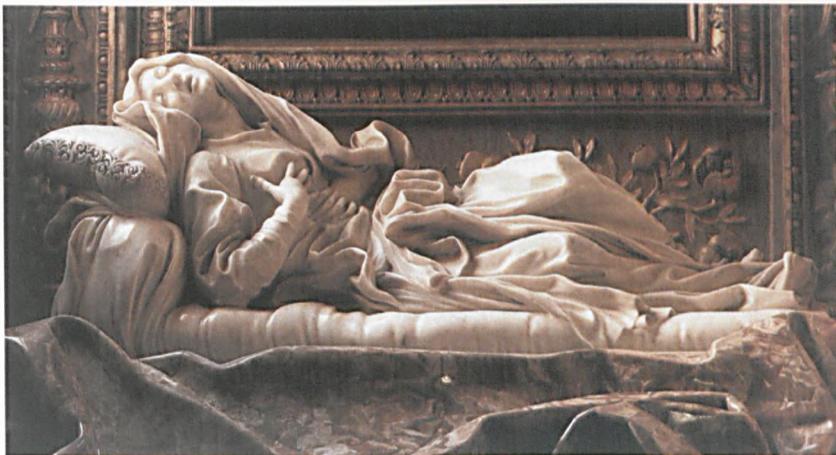


Fig. 110 – see ref. Fig. 3

To Careri, Bernini had found a solution which enables a visual image of Ludovica’s spiritual body or soul to be possible via a metaphorical physical body. This transformation is brought about by the medium of the extraordinary flame-like folds and creases of her

robe, perhaps, as we have seen, deliberately referring to the *incendium amoris* or fire of love as described in the influential seventeenth-century text *Pia Desideria* to describe the soul's love of God.



Fig. 111 – see ref. Fig. 27

For Dyan Elliott, there is no doubt that the ecstatic saint was a passive victim of an abusive relationship, with the confessor on the one hand but also of God. She describes ecstasies as ‘anaesthetised’, concluding that:

Stretched like parchment, she is suspended between two sharp instruments of revelation – the one belonging to God and the other to her confessor. ... By establishing his own control [the confessor] was simultaneously establishing God's control.¹⁰⁶

Elliott omits to consider the visual side of the ecstatic saint in this equation, as the saint can also be framed as the passive object of both the artist and the viewer. *Ludovica's* self-surrender, as *Teresa's*, is visually constructed through fire, in the sense of the flame-like folds of their drapery. Art historians readily assimilate Teresa's account of her vision to these marble folds. Irving Lavin writes,

Teresa's drapery... is broken and irregular, with scant relation to the body beneath. The crackling expanse of folds seems animated by a discharge of energy flowing along the linear channels of the cherub's dress. ...the flame-like pattern of Teresa's robe is a visual counterpart of her own metaphor, ‘toda abrasada’.¹⁰⁷

Perniola writes that ‘Saint Theresa's body disappears in the drapery of her tunic’ and that her body is ‘engulfed’ and ‘transformed into fabric’.¹⁰⁸ Both Lavin and Perniola posit the existence of a ‘real’ body ‘beneath’ the marble folds while simultaneously

The danger of associating a ‘done-to’ body with the type of intensely paradoxical pleasure-through-pain experienced by women like Teresa, Ludovica and Margery during their ecstasy finds expression in Avigdor Posèq's essay on Caravaggio's ecstatic *Magdalene* (Fig. 111). Whereas Careri's model attributed a certain degree of autonomy to the saint's action of ‘self-surrender’, Posèq re-assigns the pleasure/pain dichotomy by describing the painting as a ‘spiritually ravished Magdalene, modelled on a mythological victim of rape’.¹⁰⁵

perceiving its non-existence – the fabric disallows a visual relation to a body recognisable as female.

Here the apparent passivity of a body consumed by divine flame results in that body's annihilation: a discouraging result both for the status of the ecstatic experience itself, as well as for the nature of the viewer's scopic relation with a body reduced to a fetishistic excess of form.

Is the body's annihilation and negation, however, the only possible consequence of ecstasy, and in particular of the 'fire of love'? This depends on how fire is conceptualised. Bal, for instance, conceives of the fire, implanted within Teresa's body by the angel, as consuming her entire body until nothing else is left but a void. However, there exists a precedent within Christian visual culture where a paradoxical relationship is constructed between a female body and flame; the iconography of the Virgin Mary as prefigured by the 'burning bush' of the Old Testament. In the book of Deuteronomy Moses is visited by God in the form of a burning bush, but the bush is not consumed by the fire. In an idea which may have originally been encouraged by Gregory of Nyssa, the Virgin Mary's body, pure and intact despite impregnation and childbirth, became seen as having been prefigured by this Old Testament story.¹⁰⁹ Popular in Eastern Orthodox Christianity, the iconography was also well known in the West (such as in Fig. 112 and Fig. 113).¹¹⁰



Fig. 112: Nicholas Froment, 'The Burning Bush' (detail), 1476, Wood, 410 x 305 cm, Cathedrale Saint Sauveur, Aix-en-Provence



Fig. 113: Georges Trubert, 'Madonna of the Burning Bush', 1480-90, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

The Virgin Mary, held up by the Church as a role model for women, is the ultimate passive body, in her acceptance of divine impregnation: 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' (Luke 1:38) but also in a bodily sense, in the notion of the virginal body as 'sealed' which was commonplace in the Renaissance. The image of the 'sealed sieve' can be traced back to the ancient legend of the Vestal Virgins but a general iconography of the virginal body as a sealed body is also encouraged by the metaphorical interpretations of the Song of Songs, including the line, 'A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a garden locked, a fountain sealed.' (Song of Solomon, 4:12) and the widespread imagery of the *hortus conclusus* in depictions of the Virgin Mary. In *The Female Nude*, Lynda Nead regrets that this fetishistic construction of the body is 'an aesthetic that has structured the representation of the female body in western art since antiquity...' ¹¹¹ Since the construal of the interior of the female body as horrific by the early Christian Fathers, the sealed, supernaturally untouchable body of the Virgin Mary was held up as a model of ideal femininity.

It is fascinating that, in the construction of the Virgin Mary as prefigured by the burning bush, the violation or sexual possession of a female body is equated with consumption by fire. The Virgin cannot be consumed or penetrated. Like a sealed shell, her body is a surface which cannot be breached, its interior completely void, and this image is all the more reinforced by her having undergone conception, pregnancy and birth. Only in this ultimately fetishistically constructed form of femininity could a woman be depicted as going through these female bodily experiences but without the body itself being in any way implicated. We remember that in Mieke Bal's description of Bernini's *Teresa*, the only alternative construction of the female body, one which is consumed by the flame, seems to be annihilation.

...the propagation of the fire of love from inside out, so that Teresa's skin, that outer limit of the body, partakes of it; hence, her body's limits are themselves no longer limits...Her whole body becomes a flame: each part of it, of its cover, its surface but beneath which nothing else remains, becomes a flame; fire comes to overrule previous shapes.¹¹²

Hildegard of Bingen and an alternative concept of the body

It is in the writings of Hildegard of Bingen that we find another conceptual model for the body, still based around fire, which escapes from the models based around a fetishistic visual relationship of interior and exterior. In *Scivias* Hildegard describes her vision of Creation with the creative force portrayed in the form of a flame:

...a blazing fire, incomprehensible, inextinguishable, wholly living and wholly Life, with a flame in it the colour of the sky, which burned ardently with a gentle breath, and which was as inseparably within the blazing fire as the viscera are within a human being.¹¹³

Hildegard goes on to explain this vision:

...before any creatures were made the Infinite Word was indivisibly in the Father... But after He assumed flesh, the Word also remained inseparably in the Father; for as a person does not exist without the vital movements within his viscera, so the only Word of the Father could in no way be separated from Him.¹¹⁴

What is significant about this concept is that Hildegard does not perceive of the body in the same sense as in Mieke Bal's emptied, consumed Teresa or the untouchable shell of the Virgin. Instead she sees the body as a flame-like substance, with no inside or outside – she uses the body and its interior organs, indeed, as a physical metaphor for an ethereal substance. Being consumed by flame did not mean becoming nothing as Bal would

have it, but rather that the body is indivisible and without boundaries, like the nature of flame itself. The integrity and wholeness of the body's interior and exterior is rather structured in terms of the flame-like Holy Spirit, and through that image to the bodily Jesus within the divine Father. Indeed it seems to be one of Hildegard's preoccupations to stress the unity of the Trinity in her texts, absorbing within the microcosm of the body the wider paradox of the penetrating Father and the penetrated Son which we saw earlier.

We remember that Teresa described her vision as follows:

...In his hands I saw a long golden spear and at the end of the iron tip I seemed to see a point of fire. With this he seemed to pierce my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails. When he drew it out, I thought he was drawing them out with it and he left me completely afire with a great love for God.

Teresa visualises the interior of her body as being penetrated by fire, and although she feels her entrails being drawn out, rather than a void or an impossibility remaining, she is *completely afire*. Where I would locate Teresa's discourse of fire closer to Hildegard's than Bal's or Bernini's readings of her text, is at the point where for Lavin it is a robe with 'scant relation to the body' which represents 'toda abrasada', where Perniola wrote that her body is 'engulfed' and 'transformed', and in particular where Bal insists 'a surface beneath which nothing else remains'. Rather than dismissing or denying the body when it is consumed by flame, Teresa redefines her own body in terms of flame. Teresa's acceptance of the angel's penetration, rather than being construed as a passive enjoyment of violation, is paradoxically reclaimed by the saint. The very vulnerability which Teresa permits upon her body can allow a liberation in terms of conceptualisation of the body's structure which is no longer therefore a sealed shell containing an unknowable interior of 'lack' as fetishism would have it. On the contrary, the body's limits are redefined, so that Teresa can claim as within and indivisible from her body, the fire which other commentators would see as consuming her.

Terry Eagleton argued that a concept of bodily subjectivity is only possible in postmodern thought, once separated from Cartesian dualism.¹¹⁵ Some scholars such as David Hillman also attribute the original development of an inside-outside binary concept of the body to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, arguing that modern concepts of subjectivity date from that period.¹¹⁶ Without wishing to enter into specific arguments of context and evidence, I intend merely to identify a commonality and to suggest that it carries a trace concept, in the undercurrent of society, which may provide a language for bodily subjectivity today.

Joan of Arc

Like Teresa, Joan of Arc has entered visual culture and popular culture, and her story has been structured in particular ways by the interventions of various artists and commentators. I would like to look in particular at the 1948 film starring Ingrid Bergman and directed by Victor Fleming, where the ideas I have been developing here are engaged with on different levels.

The film strongly implies that Joan was raped in prison by her male guards – or at least, the threat of such a rape is at the forefront of her traumatic experience there. She begs to be transferred to a Church prison with female wardens. While in the same prison, however, Joan has a vision which is portrayed in terms of a divine penetration; or at least the idea that a divinity ‘comes upon her’ as in the sense of the annunciation.

In the film this is an extraordinary sequence where the progression of Joan’s response to and reception of this divine force is compellingly portrayed by Bergman’s powerfully subtle use of a progressive change in facial expression. As the camera gradually descends upon her upturned face, isolated in the blackness, her expression gradually alters; tears spring up and roll down her cheeks. Bergman conveys the shift from Joan’s initial joy at hearing the spirit voices again to a form of fear, then determination, followed by a moment of profound understanding, knowledge and acceptance at the point where the music changes, and she seems to imperceptibly nod then smile accepting her divinely-inspired duty (Fig. 114 to Fig. 119).



Fig. 114



Fig. 115



Fig. 116



Fig. 117

Both the rape in the prison and the penetrating descent of the divine during Joan's ecstasy are experienced bodily – the historical Joan, during her trial, insisted on the bodily nature of her visions: 'I saw them with my bodily eyes as well as I see you.'¹¹⁷ By contextualising the vision like this, and by portraying it so forcefully as a descent and pulling down into the self, combined with her gradual intense acceptance of that force upon her, Bergman and Fleming implicate Joan's body in the ecstasy in an active sense, in the very paradox of receiving and accepting which Teresa also uses – rather than just being consumed by the flame, *Teresa* internalises and accepts its transformation of her body just as Bergman's Joan first fears, then assumes within herself the force and weight of the vision.

Joan of Arc was famous for having been burnt at the stake. The main reason heretics were burnt in medieval times, apart from the intention to replicate the flames of hell, was to dispose completely and finally of the body. In fact, since the body of a heretic could not be buried in consecrated ground, the disposal of the body after execution would have posed a problem. The remains of the physical bodies of supposed heretics, including mystics like

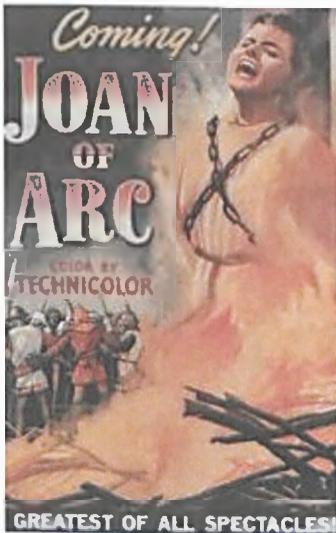


Fig. 120: Victor Fleming (dir), Ingrid Bergman, 'Joan of Arc', 1948, film poster

Joan of Arc or Marguerite of Porete, were an excess with no place due to them.

In a poster advertising the 1948 film, Fig. 120, the flames merge with Joan's flame-coloured dress so that her body and the flame become indistinguishable; she is being consumed, her body annihilated. Associated with a dramatic facial expression of pain, the poster accompanies the image by the tagline 'Greatest of all spectacles.' Referring to the moment of Joan's death, this reduces the saint to a visual object, imposing upon her body the utter passivity, both physical and visual, of the agonising annihilation by fire combined with the viewer's impassive, consuming gaze.

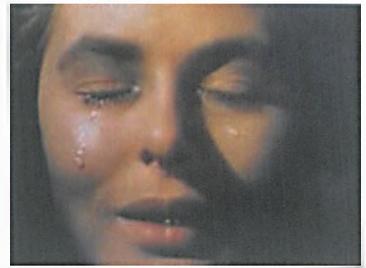


Fig. 118



Fig. 114 - Fig. 119: Victor Fleming (director), Ingrid Bergman, 'Joan of Arc', 1948, stills extracted from 1.33.00 to 1.34.25

This scene as incarnated in the actual film is quite different. Subtle use of camera position means that we witness her execution from a point within the fire, indeed actually seeing from her point of view at the very moment of death, as when Joan looks at the cross which a priest is holding up to her face (Fig. 121, Fig. 122, Fig. 123).

The annihilation of Joan herself is not the spectacle here, as the poster would have it. Indeed the concluding image of the film is not of her body, but of what she herself is seeing as she dies. The film is careful, as in the vision scene, to avoid depicting Joan's visions literally, and the moment of death is characterised by the transformation of the crucifix which Joan is looking at into an evocative shape in the clouds, the sunlight surging out from all sides (Fig. 123). It is an identifying gaze, rather than a voyeuristic gaze, which is being solicited.

This is reinforced by the fact that the real bodily focus of the scene of her death, in fact, is transferred to the voice. The movement of breath and voice claimed by

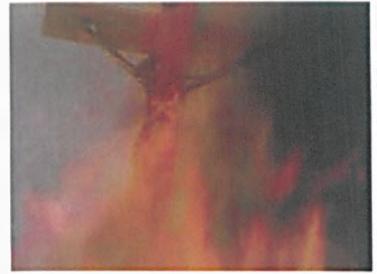


Fig. 121



Fig. 122



Fig. 121 - Fig. 123: Victor Fleming (dir), 'Joan of Arc', 1948, stills from 1.40



Fig. 124: Victor Fleming (dir), Ingrid Bergman, 'Joan of Arc', 1948, still taken from c. 1.38



Fig. 125 – detail, see ref. Fig. 1

Bergman in the final scenes enables Joan to finally resist the negation which the robe of fire imposed upon *Teresa's* body. The painful joy of the final moment is then partially accessed

by the viewer, who is allowed only the merest glimpse at Joan's own vision at the moment of death, left intentionally obscure. The focus is on Bergman's head and shoulders as she gradually succumbs to the lack of oxygen (Fig. 124), her face never attaining the theatrical agony of the poster image (Fig. 120). Instead Bergman resembles Bernini's *Teresa* (Fig. 125).

Bernini can only show Teresa's mouth open to hint at the 'silent moan' which the saint says escaped her during ecstasy, but Bergman compellingly uses breathing, swallowing and coughing, which she then reverses in her thrillingly euphoric interpretation of Joan's dying cry of the name of Jesus. Overriding the limits of the body, Bergman as Joan reclaims and possesses the bodily death of the saint as her own.¹¹⁸

Chapter Four

Pregnant moments: maternity, death and the 'absent' gaze

The partly-opened eyes of Cleopatra, as depicted by Artemisia Gentileschi (Fig. 126), function as a sign of her remaining consciousness. Mary Garrard notes that, 'this small detail... changes the figure from a lifeless object to a haunting human presence'.¹ Developing this remark, Griselda Pollock notes that her body is poised 'held on the edge of subjectivity':

It is not the aestheticisation of death through its projection on to a soporific or mortal femininity. It becomes – through the refusal of these tropes – a painting of a woman who is here *portrayed*, and is given the status of subjecthood... Her continuing consciousness... firmly locates a subjective presence inside the body. The body becomes not merely its site but its articulation. Veiled by the drooping eyelids, yet once encountered, that momentary sign of consciousness polices any purely scopic relation to the body, making the body a site of being.²



Fig. 126: Artemisia Gentileschi, 'Cleopatra', 1610-12, Amedeo Morandotti, Milan

Gentileschi's *Mary Magdalene* (Fig. 78), painted between 1625 and 1626, shares many aspects of the *Cleopatra*.³ Although the posture is different, both paintings depict a woman alone, their partly open eyes indicating a similarly paradoxical mental state. The woman is readily identifiable as the saint Mary Magdalene, by her long, loose hair and the jar on the table beside her, representing the alabaster ointment jar the Magdalene used to anoint the body of Jesus in the Gospel story. The moment depicted in the Magdalene's life,

however, is less clear. Mary Garrard picks up on the suspended nature of the saint's experience:

Her red and swollen eyes imply that she has been grieving, but they now are partly open, with a fixed stare. The image of a figure in transition, opening eyes swollen from crying, is a master stroke.⁴

Between the despair of regret for her past life and a trancelike state of religious ecstasy, Gentileschi has captured a moment when the Magdalene is in-between states – the pain of her regret is giving way to the pleasure of her ecstasy and revelation. She belongs fully to neither one state nor the other. As a symbol of the contemplative life, and a figure whose image within culture is suspended between prostitution and chastity, Mary Magdalene is particularly appropriate as a holder of an ambiguous gaze, directed inward at this moment of profound emotion.



Fig. 127 – see ref. Fig. 78

Pollock traces another suspension in-between states in the work of Gentileschi,



Fig. 128: Artemisia Gentileschi, 'Lucretia', (detail), c. 1623-5, Gerolamo Etro, Milan

in her work *Lucretia* (Fig. 128), painted in the 1620s. In the original Roman story, Lucretia, who has been raped, denounces her rapist then commits suicide. In the painting Pollock detects ambiguity in the way in which Lucretia wields the dagger, the instrument of her suicide:

The dagger in the painting is certainly not held as if to hurt Lucretia herself and equally not to attack another. It has the look of being held like Cleopatra's asp – in a staying motion, while she resolves on resistance? swears revenge?⁵

The potential for eroticisation and objectification of the violated woman in the Lucretia story, exploited in pliant and seductive nudes by artists such as Titian, is not enabled in Gentileschi's rendering. Pollock concludes that 'Fantasy is stayed by the forcefulness of this embodiment of a ravished woman faced with an awful choice, which she has not yet made.'⁶

In these representations, time and subjectivity itself is suspended, whether between life and death, or grief and ecstasy. In the first part of this chapter, via an oscillation between the work of Artemisia Gentileschi and Cindy Sherman, I will continue to explore the tropes of passivity and unconsciousness, and how certain images undermine these associations to paradoxically suggest the depiction of subjectivity. As the chapter develops, the paradoxical temporality in these images is expanded into a discourse of the temporality of pregnancy. Finally the imagery of pregnancy and maternity is invoked to provide a model for a visualisation of an embodied femininity which transcends the phallic and fetishistic modes of viewing which I have demonstrated operate, in relation to the female body, throughout Western visual culture.

Cindy Sherman

To move away from these roughly contemporary seventeenth century paintings, I want to draw a connection now to the twentieth century. A bodily temporal suspension such



Fig. 129: Cindy Sherman, 'Untitled Film Still #6', 1977-1980

as that embodied in the figures of women depicted by Artemisia Gentileschi is echoed in the early photography of Cindy Sherman. In most if not all of the images from the famous series called the *Untitled Film Stills* from the 1970s, Sherman plays with temporality. I am mostly concerned here, however, with those images which, on the surface, indicate absence – where signifiers of death are written into the female body. In the *Untitled Film Stills* there are several of these (such as Fig. 129), photographs which also anticipate her subsequent series of *Centerfolds* where, shifted into the horizontal format, such issues are even more insistent (Fig. 130).



Fig. 130: Cindy Sherman, 'Untitled #89' (Centerfolds/Horizontal), 1982

The initial difference between the *Film Stills* and the *Centerfolds* is temporality, as constructed by the titles of the two series. For Laura Mulvey it is clear cut; she writes on the *Film Stills*,

...the viewer's curiosity may be attracted to the surrounding narrative. But any speculation about a story, about actual events and the character depicted, quickly reaches a dead end. The visitor at a Cindy Sherman show must be well aware that the Film Still is constructed for this one image only, and that nothing exists either before or after the moment shown.⁷

Mulvey's description of the *Film Stills* is literally correct. The fact of the image's uniqueness and isolation, that the visitor may indeed be aware of, does not, however, take into account the act of imagination which the photograph elicits. Even for a 'knowing' viewer, therefore, impressions of past and future are conveyed; what past and future that might be is partly constructed by the studied mise-en-scène of the photograph, and partly by the viewer's own culturally informed perspective. Even in the very suspension and freezing of the image, multiple realities and temporalities co-exist. When it comes to the *Centerfolds*, Mulvey reads them as passive and unconscious, arranged for the camera's and voyeur's gaze:

Their eyes gaze into the distance. They are not aware of their clothes, which are sometimes carelessly rumpled, so that, safe alone with their thoughts, their bodies are, slightly, revealed to the viewer. They exude vulnerability and sexual availability like lovesick heroine/victims in a romantic melodrama... These photographs reiterate the 'to-be-looked-at-ness' of femininity.⁸



Fig. 131: Cindy Sherman, 'Untitled #96' (Centerfolds/Horizontals), 1982

In scholarship about Cindy Sherman we repeatedly find these photographs characterised in terms of absence, unconsciousness, or stasis. For Rosalind Krauss, the tendency to generalise has led to Sherman's work being seen as simply 'about' voyeurism: or as demonstrating the operation of a masculinised gaze, as if to say 'there is the woman fetishized in the beam of the gaze.'⁹ These are limiting characterizations which, for Krauss, miss the subtle ways in which Sherman's photography in fact undermines the very functioning of voyeuristic and fetishistic modes of looking.

It is interesting that Mulvey's reading attempts to identify the direction of the women's gaze – 'their eyes gaze into the distance' – and then concludes a total lack of awareness which makes them sexually vulnerable. Sherman's photographs could indeed be construed on one level as placing the viewer in the position of the sexual predator upon a helpless body. It is perhaps the genius of the series, however, that two levels are possible. The women here are neither closing their eyes and submitting outright to the voyeur, nor are they straightforwardly staring back in challenge. When considering the images in terms of the depiction of thought, the object of the gaze becomes interior: not a gaze without an object, but a gaze which transgresses traditional visual modes.

Elisabeth Bronfen characterises Sherman's work as an 'oscillation between fixed identity positions.' For her, the *Centerfolds* series in particular poses the question, 'Do I exist as an animate body or negate my existence through deanimation?'¹⁰ The either/or conundrum presented by Bronfen's model of 'oscillation' sites hysteria as a specific

positional ambivalence, where existence/non-existence are posited against animation/deanimation. These pairings may, however, paradoxically reinforce the very fixity of the identity positions they resist. The hysteric body may therefore remain trapped to some extent within a fetishistic gaze framework. As Rosalind Krauss commented referring to scholarship about Sherman,

...blinding itself to anything outside the vertical register of the image/form, it repeats, at the level of analysis, the very fixity it describes as operating the Male Gaze at the level of its social effects.¹¹

For Krauss, it is the move towards horizontality in Sherman's work (especially when viewed retrospectively as an oeuvre comprising her later 'object' photographs of formless bodily matter) which is a powerful visual gesture away from the phallic, fetishising mode of looking which demands 'the completeness, the formal coherence, and the verticality of the visual.'¹² All the supposedly inanimate characters in

Sherman's work are in fact participants in a network of multiple temporalities woven by signs within the photograph. Some images even include specific props which act as signs. The character in *Untitled Film Still #6* (Fig. 129) has been looking into a mirror; the one in #34 (Fig. 132) has been reading a novel; the girl in #96 from the *Centerfolds* (Fig. 131) has been looking at adverts torn out of a newspaper. These elements of temporality and specificity hamper a reading of 'stasis' as dead or asleep. Instead the character's emotional life opens up in the imagination of the viewer.



Fig. 132: Cindy Sherman, 'Untitled Film Still #34', 1970-1980

Temporality and the image: *Magdalene* and *Cleopatra*

In Artemisia Gentileschi's *Magdalene*, a similar effect has been put in place. Where

Pollock argued that the half-open eyes preclude a voyeuristic relation to the body, I would go one step further to argue that the multiple temporalities contained within the image, noticed as we saw earlier by Mary Garrard, give the woman an existence beyond the instant of ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’ with which the viewer seems, at first glance, to be presented with. What that existence is, depends partly on the



Fig. 133 – see ref. Fig. 156

viewer’s familiarity with the cultural mythology surrounding the figure of Mary Magdalene, but the figure also speaks for itself and throws up new suggestions and associations the longer the gaze lingers. Indeed, it is not only a temporality within the mise-en-scene presented in the artwork but of the process of the gaze itself which is in play: incidentally, the same process operates in the shift between the seventeenth and twentieth century images juxtaposed here. The initial glance at the image does not permit a deep enough reading, and a prolonged gaze is solicited gradually through the signs within. The viewer is irresistibly and gradually drawn into the intensity of the moment.¹³

In her work on textuality Mieke Bal provides a possible methodological model for this temporal reading of the image:

I shall discuss those elements as signs, or, more precisely, as sign events, that contribute to our awareness that the work is processed as something we may call a text, even if no specific meaning can be assigned to them. The concept of text will be used ...here to mean a combination of elements leading to semiotic events – acts of reading – a combination that is structured enough to be perceived as a whole and materially presented as complete. Thus defined, novels, poems, drawings, and paintings are texts.¹⁴

She continues,

Signs like these make readers process, not a particular text, but a general sense of ‘text’: a sense of coherence, of structure, of narrativity, of meaningfulness emerges, but no specific meaning, or rather, a plurality of possible meanings emerge – whose undecidability is precisely the token of meaningfulness.¹⁵

The tear stains on the Magdalene's cheek and her half-open eyes function as narrative signs which enable the painting to function as a text, and communicate a temporality without having to function literally as a narrative of 'what is happening'. The



Fig. 134: Guido Cagnacci, 'Death of Cleopatra', 1658, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

image gains not only coherence but also compellingness as not only the idea of narrative but the idea of a depiction of a thinking, existing self can begin to emerge.

In the mid 1600s Guido Cagnacci painted two versions of the *Death of Cleopatra*. The earlier version (Fig. 134), where, surrounded by mourners, the queen's head gracefully tilts as she succumbs to the snake's poison, is sad, gentle and

attractive – the tender death of a beautiful woman.¹⁶ In the later version (Fig. 135), however, there is a challenge to the viewer which the other painting does not pose. This painting is more difficult to read – it is suspended in time but containing past, present and

future. We do not know whether she is about to be bitten, or has already been bitten and lies dying. The touch of compellingness lies in the queen's half-open eyes. Even the snake, seeming to pause gazing at its victim either before or after the deadly strike, participates in the network of gazes her eyes invoke. The



Fig. 135: Guido Cagnacci, 'Death of Cleopatra', 1660, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan

lone woman is imbued with presence, and uncertainty of meaning becomes meaningfulness.

A comparison of the power of the two Cagnacci paintings illustrates the effect of temporality well in the attribution of a suggestion of consciousness through the multiplying temporal and narrative possibilities. What it does not explain, however, is the fact that it is repeatedly in the female body when construed as absent that this attribution of subjectivity can take place.

We have seen how Artemisia Gentileschi's adaptation of the pose of Raphael's *Pope Julius II* appropriates the visuality of a masculine form of power while subverting it. Rosalind Krauss used a similar argument in her discussion of 'horizontal' as a feature of the photography of Cindy Sherman. As Gentileschi appropriates a visuality of masculinity, Sherman appropriates a visuality associated with the feminine – a motif that, rather than reducing these female characters to passive objects of the gaze, transgresses the fetishising idealisation of the female body as perfect, whole, and upright. This is not to suggest that all reclining females transgress phallic modes of viewing, but that there is a distinction between a horizontality that implies passivity and sexual receptivity, which I am here contrasting with a horizontality which, when combined with a compellingly portrayed subjectivity in suspension, is a movement of transgression rather than of submission.

The pregnant moment

On Cindy Sherman's *Film Stills*, Laura Mulvey writes that 'that nothing exists either before or after the moment shown. Each pregnant moment is a cutout, a tableau suggesting and denying the presence of a story.'¹⁷ The adjective 'pregnant' is used as a figure of speech, but carries a powerful load of meaning to bear on Sherman's oeuvre. 'Nothing before or after' is just as problematic an association of the temporality of pregnancy as it is of the *Film Stills*, and the association of these may permit their interaction in the development of a form of 'pregnant visuality'.

In the paintings by Gentileschi and the photographs by Sherman which denote absence, a specific type of visual 'text' has been brought into play where a paradoxical temporality provides a structure for the existence of a suspended, still image which contains a fictive past and present. The figure of the female body construed too readily as unconscious, passive or absent overlooks the potentially transgressive nature of a gaze which does not fit traditional models of either passive subordination or active looking, but instead functions in itself as a sign of subjectivity. At a 2005 conference Julia Kristeva

described the 'absent gaze' of pregnancy: 'The pregnant woman 'looks at', without 'seeing', the father, and the world... [it is a] passion turned towards the inside.'¹⁸

To draw attention to this metaphor of pregnancy is to reinstate the 'pregnant moment' by which Mulvey described Sherman's *Film Stills*, but in different terms. The metaphor of pregnancy provides not only a temporality of bodily suspension, a state containing and constantly indicating and referencing both past and future, but also a model for an absent gaze, absent only in that its object is not within the realm of the masculine, or even the visual. It is connected to a deeply bodily type of paradoxical thought which arises in the pregnant body, and which is the threshold of subjectivity.

The maternal Magdalene

Noting that the pose of the model in Caravaggio's Rome *Magdalene* (Fig. 136) was shared with that of the roughly contemporary *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (Fig. 137), Judith Mann draws attention to the significant difference between the two – namely that the



Fig. 136 – see ref. Fig. 33



Fig. 137: Caravaggio, 'Rest on the Flight into Egypt (detail)', ca. 1596, Galleria Doria Pamphili, Rome

Virgin in the latter painting cradles a baby in her arms, whereas the Magdalene's arms are empty. She concludes,

The Magdalene's pose and encircling arms recall this most ordinary of maternal positions and one which the artist used in *Rest on the Flight*. This allusion to the

Virgin's role of mother is presented less as a commentary on the Magdalen's life, as it was inconsequential whether or not she had children, but rather as a reminder to the viewer that Mary Magdalen should be understood as the other Mary, who sinned like we do, but who was forgiven as we potentially could be, too. She becomes an empathetic and therefore more understandable model of the absolution from sin.¹⁹

The Magdalene's role as the 'other Mary' was indeed well known in the seventeenth century, as she was seen as a former sinner, forgiven and loved by Jesus who, unlike the Virgin, could be a literally accessible model for ordinary people seeking redemption. Mann glosses the seeming reference to maternity which she has discovered, in purely theological terms.²⁰

The cultural associations of the Magdalene and in particular her connection with maternity have recently undergone a significant cultural upheaval in the commotion surrounding the book *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown, which has as its central premise the notion that 'The Holy Grail is Mary Magdalene... the mother of the royal bloodline of Jesus Christ.'²¹ In Caravaggio's Rome *Magdalene* (Fig. 136) the saint's maternity is simultaneously offered and withdrawn – her apparent mental absence reinforces the association of negativity. *The Da Vinci Code* attributes a similarly paradoxical maternity to the saint. In the construction proposed in the book, although presented as the ultimate divine mother, she is also a mother without a child. In the plot of the book she is the 'wronged Queen' whose descendancy was forced to remain secret, but what is more, the reality of motherhood remains on a symbolic level - the book utilises the symbolism of the shape of the Grail, the chalice, to represent the womb of the Magdalene which carried Jesus' bloodline, as well as referring to the saint as 'the Rose' citing specific imagery of sexuality and female genitalia.²² This focus on the body of the mother, posits the Magdalene as a figure of pregnancy or pre-motherhood rather than motherhood itself.

The Magdalene story has so far been associated with maternity only in a limited way. Katherine Jansen draws attention to fertility miracles associated with the cult of the saint, as well as certain medieval Italian images which seem to depict a 'maternal' Magdalene. The saint's association with the so-called 'Marseilles miracle' in the early fifteenth century reinforced a medieval association with fertility, gardening and even midwifery.²³ Various fourteenth century paintings also depict the Magdalene in a maternal, protective role with respect to donors or penitents, and holy women from Francesca

Romana to Catherine of Siena referred to the Magdalene in strongly maternal terms, but always in terms of a theological or spiritual motherhood.²⁴

A forthcoming study by Penny Jolly, however, identifies signs of a physical pregnancy of Mary Magdalene depicted in several late medieval paintings including altarpieces by Rogier van der Weyden such as Fig. 138.²⁵ The idea of the pregnant Magdalene seems shrouded even more deeply in obscurity than that of the pregnant Virgin, itself an uncommon subject in Western art.²⁶

For Jolly, the pregnancy of the saint, although literally represented in the swelling belly and the conventions of maternity dress referred to in the artworks she cites, is metaphorical and theological in meaning. Arguing that the pregnancy stands for ‘conversion and inspiring hope of rebirth’, Jolly concludes that ‘for the Magdalene, all things carnal transform into expressions of deep spirituality.’²⁷ Encapsulated in ‘the source of the Magdalene’s sin and vehicle of her transformation—her physical body’ the state of pregnancy is being seen to embody in a theological sense a suspended nature of being where the physical and spiritual are in a state containing multiple temporalities

– where the potentiality of spiritual rebirth and renewal is visually and concretely figured in the site of human carnality and past pleasure.²⁸ In the figure of the Magdalene, at the moment of her conversion embodying both a carnal, physical past and a holy, spiritual future, pregnancy is the means of visually containing both states.

The paintings by Rogier van der Weyden symbolized the pregnancy through the means of contemporary dress codes known by the artist and his audience in the popular culture of the fifteenth century Netherlands (the undone ‘maternity laces’ identified by Jolly). The very mundaneity and specificity of contextualizing a theological metaphor in terms of the physical female body, and the



Fig. 138: Rogier van der Weyden, 'Crucifixion', 1440s, Staatliche Museen, Berlin

contemporary and local customs surrounding it, site the Magdalene as a literal body which uses a bodily pregnancy to signify independently on a figurative level.

Pregnancy and the mind/body duality

Despite the interesting bodily ambiguity encapsulated in the Magdalene's culture and imagery, the use of the pregnant body here is problematic. While at one level pregnancy could be elevated by its assimilation to spiritual knowledge and fulfillment, in that very elevation the value of the bodily is being negated only to reaffirm a patriarchal discourse valuing spirit over body, and assimilating the male to spirit and the female to body. This classic binary construction, expressed specifically in terms of pregnancy, is traceable back to ancient philosophy.²⁹

The body of Mary Magdalene appearing to be visually, literally pregnant in the paintings by Rogier van der Weyden is principally accounted for by Jolly in terms of a metaphorical process through the Magdalene's life. Rather than a creative process as such, here it is the Magdalene's personal, intellectual and spiritual journey which is depicted figured in the temporal and paradoxical transformational progress of pregnancy and childbirth:

The key mystical concepts, widespread throughout the Magdalene's cult, are her burning love (*Caritas*) for Christ, that earns her the role of Bride of Christ; her being filled with grace by the Holy Spirit; her sufferance of the pain of contrition; and her participation in narratives of rebirth and the Resurrection. Her spiritual transformation thus parallels the course of human pregnancy: the union of male and female, conception, labor pains, and birth... Rogier thus draws on the recurrent carnal-spiritual duality expressed in discussions of the Magdalene and uses pregnancy to represent the transformation that lies at the heart of her cult.³⁰

The body of the Magdalene is a body uniquely endowed within Christianity, thanks to the legend constructed around this 'prostitute-saint', with a suspended coexistence of sexuality and chastity, and which within itself contains the masculine and feminine principles – the bodily and the spiritual ambiguously and troublingly coexisting. Within the signifying potential of this body, in the artworks cited by Jolly the literal signs of pregnancy are activated as a device by which spiritual experience is metaphorically played out upon the body's surface. The consequence of this identification here, however, is to characterise the bodily pregnancy in the terms of a discourse which would fix the traditionally childless Magdalene as a female philosopher in the patriarchal tradition of one

who rises above the bodily to attain a masculine spirituality. In the Christian unconscious, traced back to the ancient Gnostic texts, the Magdalene may already have played that role as evidenced in the mysterious lines from the Gospel of Thomas, verse 114:

Simon Peter said to him, 'Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life.' Jesus said, 'I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven.'³¹

The Magdalene represents the path to Christian revelation, the female philosopher who has access to secret knowledge – a role she again seems to have reprised throughout Christian culture since the Gnostic 'Gospel of Mary' where the Mary character states, 'What is hidden from you, I will proclaim to you.'³² She is constructed through her mystical, metaphorical pregnancy as a 'thinker' and thereby gains a perception of subjectivity.



Fig. 139: Paula Modersohn-Becker, 'Self Portrait on her Sixth Wedding Anniversary', 1906, Kunstsammlungen Böttcherstrasse / Paula Modersohn-Becker Museum, Bremen

In her study of the maternal subject in art by Paula Modersohn-Becker and Käthe Kollwitz, Rosemary Betterton critiques Julia Kristeva's notions of the maternal with reference to *Self Portrait on Her Sixth Wedding Anniversary* (Fig. 139). In the portrait, Modersohn-Becker represents herself as pregnant, although this was not to be literally the case in the artist's life for another year. Betterton argues that Modersohn-Becker's metaphorical pregnancy balances the fantasy coherence and wholeness of the nude and the loss of identity which Kristeva associates with the maternal, and 'indicates a condition of temporary suspension between subject and object, between the virginal and maternal, and

between the identity of artist as the maker of images and mother as the maker of flesh'.³³

For Betterton, Kristeva reinforces the patriarchal notion of motherhood replacing artistic creativity which we saw earlier has had the effect of barring women from artistic creativity. She quotes from Kristeva:

The speaker reaches this limit, this requisite of sociality, only by virtue of a particular, discursive practice called 'art'. A woman also attains it (and in our society, *especially*) through the strange form of split symbolization (threshold of language and instinctual drive, of the 'symbolic' and the 'semiotic') of which the act of giving birth consists.³⁴

Betterton concludes:

Kristeva likens the position of the artist to that of the mother but argues that, although analogous, the two are incompatible... The 'artist' and the 'mother' represent two opposite poles in which, on the one hand, the mind can interpret the maternal experience and on the other, the body merely enacts it. In separating artistic production from the subjectless, 'biological' experience of maternity in this way, Kristeva appears to reproduce the gendered mind and body split which is central to western systems of thought.³⁵

Kristeva seems to be arguing for a metaphor of pregnancy, applicable both to creativity and to the emergence of subjectivity, which may reinforce a dualistic notion separating body and mind. For Kristeva, subjectivity itself is enabled by the 'simultaneity' of pregnancy while at the same time, the 'Mother as subject is delusion'.³⁶ The pregnant body, in Kristeva's model, is construed as a split and permanently 'othered' entity. As Ewa Ziarek summarises, pregnancy represents 'the imprint of the other within the same'.³⁷ The theory of the subject-in-process which Kristeva developed uses the metaphor of the pregnant body to refer to the constant negotiation of parts of our 'selves' which are simultaneously 'other', in operation in the psyche. As Kelly Oliver explains,

In fact, Kristeva uses the maternal body with its two-in-one, or other within, as a model for all subjective relations. Like the maternal body, each one of us is what she calls a subject-in-process. As subjects-in-process we are always negotiating the other within, that is to say, the return of the repressed. Like the maternal body, we are never completely the subjects of our own experience. Some feminists have found Kristeva's notion of a subject-in-process a useful alternative to traditional notions of an autonomous unified (masculine) subject.³⁸

Betterton refers to Kristeva's analysis of the Christian imagery of the Virgin that the threat posed by the transgression of boundaries of the maternal body is contained and controlled within the inviolate form of the Virgin Mary, and that in order to reach such a paradoxical position, what is necessary is the 'highest sublimation alien to her body'.³⁹

Betterton claims that Modersohn-Becker utilised the metaphor of pregnancy specifically in order to *reject* the idea of a bodily pregnancy while claiming the enjoyment

– or *jouissance* – of an intensely creative period of her life, when she was alone and isolated from family and husband. In doing so, the artist seems to be expressing the incompatibility between the two states, of pregnancy and of creativity. Like Rogier van der Weyden's *Magdalenes*, her pregnant figure is only symbolic, on the surface, removed from bodily experience.

Pregnant subjectivity

In Van der Weyden's fifteenth-century depictions as discussed by Penny Jolly, pregnancy was represented indexically through the surface. The pregnancy is indicated by means of a very detailed specificity of the decorations used to cover the body, the 'laces' on the garment which were traditionally loosened during pregnancy, even before the literal female body is visually engaged.



Fig. 140: Jan van Eyck, 'Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and his wife', 1434, National Gallery, London

Clothing suggesting symbolic pregnancy can also be traced in the work of Van der Weyden's contemporaries in northern European art. Van Eyck's most famous work, known as *The Arnolfini Portrait* (Fig. 140), has often been considered to represent a pregnant woman, although this interpretation is generally discounted due to fifteenth century dress fashion.⁴⁰ Edwin Hall notes that misrepresentations of the female figure as pregnant have been recorded since the seventeenth century, while citing various other contemporary artworks representing an exaggeratedly rounded belly, including some of virgin saints.⁴¹

He admits however that he is unaware of the reasons behind such a fashion: 'Whether or not this feature is explained by fifteenth-century perceptions of idealised feminine beauty, these images clearly reflect some contemporary Flemish convention whose precise meaning

is no longer readily apparent.⁴² Margaret Koster suggests that, ‘...whether literally pregnant or not, the fashion for accentuating the womb itself relates to women’s duty to bear children and to a physique that makes this possible.’⁴³

Demi Moore and the Skin-Ego

In the first section of this chapter I established that a paradoxical depiction of subjectivity could be achieved through a body that was connoted as unconscious, annihilated, assimilated to death and absence. Here, in the example of Mary Magdalene’s metaphorical pregnancy, women’s subjectivity, thought, knowledge and intellect seems to be being depicted and elevated again only at the expense of an embodied experience. Pregnancy is indexed by codes and signifiers, and a symbolic pregnancy can indeed be a powerful and enabling image. Dualism is upheld, however, and the physicality of pregnancy fundamentally abstracted, in images where a ‘bump’ operates as pure metaphor, and literal pregnancy and motherhood are indeed specifically renounced in the claims to subjectivity, intellectuality and creativity of the women represented in these images.

A second form of ‘pregnant subjectivity’ can occur in those images where a representation of a real, bodily pregnancy, often written into existing discourses of the female nude body, is combined with a strong and specifically sexual female identity constructed through the gaze. Such representations are heavily implicated in the codes and tropes of the gaze within visual culture, whether undermining or participating in them.

The term ‘pregnant subjectivity’ is used by Imogen Tyler in her work on the image of pregnancy in order to try and escape from the double bind of dualism in the representation of the pregnant body.⁴⁴ Tyler’s work on pregnancy also focuses on surface, but rather than fabrics and drapery her concern shifts one layer deeper, to the skin.

Julia Kristeva argues in *Desire in Language* that if the mother is permitted to become the subject of gestation ‘then we acknowledge the risk of losing identity’.⁴⁵ The possibility of a ‘pregnant’ subjectivity for Kristeva threatens to collapse the patriarchal signifying system. For Imogen Tyler, who draws upon Kristeva to explain societal taboos against representations of pregnancy, the representation of the ‘irreducible simultaneity’ of the pregnant body becomes possible only when throwing into question models of subjectivity based on the unity of the self.⁴⁶ Working from the famous 1991 photograph of a heavily pregnant Demi Moore on the cover of *Vanity Fair* (Fig. 141), her argument for a

concept of 'pregnant subjectivity' is linked to structures of flexible subjectivity developed by theorists such as Butler, Deleuze and Guattari, and Plant.⁴⁷ Linked to what she describes as the 'visual emphasis on the naked stretched skin of the pregnant body' in the Moore photograph, Tyler both employs and critiques Didier Anzieu's theory of the *Skin-Ego* to argue that through the emphasis on skin, Moore is accorded subjectivity for the sake of her own body, not mediated through the foetus in her womb.⁴⁸ Her body's surface confirms her subjecthood by constituting a visual encounter with a projected Skin-Ego.⁴⁹ Hence also the sub-title 'More Demi Moore': for Tyler, the woman in the photograph is constructed as the subject of her pregnancy through a skin which delimits the contours of

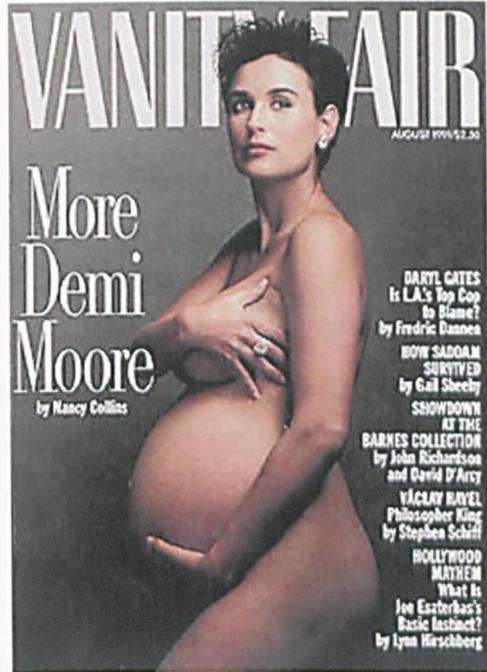


Fig. 141: Annie Leibovitz, 'Demi Moore', August 1991, Vanity Fair, New York

her body, to allow no fantasy of foetal subjecthood to interfere with the woman as subject of the pregnancy. Tyler writes, 'Moore is positioned as a subject who is the embodied site of her own transformation and gestation.'⁵⁰

Anzieu's concept of the 'Skin-ego', which has gradually gained popular currency in French psychoanalytical theory as well as in Anglophone cultural theory since its inception in 1974, establishes the skin as both the site of the ego and as its metaphorical representation.⁵¹ Ego and skin therefore share structures, functions and traits in common. Consciously evoking a modern scientific culture suffused with imagery of borders, limits and containment, Anzieu inscribes the skin-ego into these concepts.⁵² The ego therefore contains the psyche in the way that the skin is described as containing the physical body: 'Psychic space and physical space constitute each other in reciprocal metaphors; the Skin-ego is one of these metaphors'.⁵³ Hence, another metaphorical role of the Skin-ego enables, in a newborn baby, the reflexivity of touch – the one who touches is also being touched – to give rise to reflexivity of thought and enable the ego to function.⁵⁴

For Tyler, while Anzieu's assertion of the role of the skin as 'ascertaining and distinguishing the discrete self' is crucial in her theorising of pregnant subjectivity, the work is unnuanced in terms of gender and sexual difference, and, as is common to most

psychoanalytic theory, does not offer a theorisation of ego-acquisition from the perspective of the mother.⁵⁵ Tyler writes,

The skin ego of the pregnant subject does not simply hold together an individual and it does not simply protect a self, as she is already more than one and is indivisible into ones. Therefore the skin ego of the pregnant subject does not fit individualist models of ego identity.⁵⁶

Naomi Segal's interpretation of Anzieu's text, however, raises ambiguities which both confirm and contradict Tyler's critique. It begins with a compelling psychological biography of Anzieu himself, which underlines the significance of the maternal in his life and in the foundations of work.⁵⁷

The role and significance of the maternal is evoked throughout Anzieu's book, forming the crux of the infant's development of an individual Skin-ego. For Anzieu, the communication between mother and baby in the first weeks of life creates the phantasy of a 'skin common to the mother and the child, an interface with the mother on one side and the child on the other'.⁵⁸ Anzieu continues,

Before the phantasy of a common skin is constructed, the psyche of the newborn is dominated by an inter-uterine phantasy, which denies the birth and which expresses the desire, proper to primary narcissism, to return inside the mother. It is a phantasy of reciprocal inclusion, of narcissistic fusion in which the newborn more or less implicates his mother, herself emptied by the birth of the foetus she was carrying; phantasy to be revived later by the amorous experience in which each, holding the other in their arms, will envelope the other while at the same time being enveloped by them. ... The interface gradually transforms psychic functioning into an increasingly open system, which gradually leads the mother and the child towards separate functioning. But the interface maintains the two partners in a mutual symbiotic dependence. The subsequent phase requires the effacement of this common skin, and the recognition that each has their own skin and their own Ego, which is not accomplished without resistance or pain.⁵⁹

For Tyler, the specific case of the pregnant subject is not considered in Anzieu's theory, which bypasses a conceptualisation of this state where the very notion of the individual is put into question. Tyler suggests that pregnant mothers when depicted as subjects are threatening because they challenge the notion of subjectivity based on indivisibility, which a theory such as the *skin-ego* propounds.⁶⁰ Judith Butler has likewise noted, referring to Anzieu's theory, that 'unfortunately, [it] does not consider the implications of its account for the sexed body'.⁶¹ I would suggest, however, that extracts such as that quoted above do contain much that is of value in defining maternal subjectivity in such profoundly bodily terms.

The pregnant body in visibility

The attempt to reclaim the mother's subjectivity can pose problems in the context of visibility. Tyler's claim to Demi Moore's 'pregnant subjectivity' quotes Steven Connor's claims that skin operates as a kind of 'visual immune system'⁶² against penetration, but acknowledges, again quoting Connor, that skin becomes 'a masculinised conception of the body surface. ...a kind of hardness that would enclose, canalise or otherwise discipline the threatening fluidity attributed to the female body or the feminised interior'.⁶³ Tyler reads the emphasis on skin in the Demi Moore image, however, as responding to the specific threat to the pregnant woman which the potential or real visibility of the foetus poses. Tyler's motivation is to combat the increasingly emotive and detailed images of the foetus in the womb, visible not only in medical contexts but in the general media.⁶⁴ The danger of such images, it is clearly argued, depersonifies the mother and encourages the negation of the mother's rights, in particular in debates referring to abortion.⁶⁵ Tyler concludes,

This photograph can thus be read as a shield against the imaging of foetal personhood and a refusal of the mother/child dichotomy that monopolises discourses around reproduction. Through my reading of the cultural significance of skin I have suggested that the Moore photograph re-envelops the foetus within the pregnant body, an envelopment which can be theorised and in turn can present ways for women to re-envelop themselves as the subjects of their own gestation.⁶⁶

Tyler notes the extreme visibility of the pregnant body in the media since the watershed point marked by the seminal Demi Moore photograph (Fig. 141). In particular, magazine covers since that landmark image have repeatedly quoted and re-quoted it, even fifteen years later in the present day, albeit failing to recapture the power, originality and poise of the original and falling back into traditional rhetoric of the female body and gaze – such in as the example of Britney Spears (Fig. 142).⁶⁷ The potential for transgressiveness, in Tyler's framing, is



Fig. 142: Alexi Lubomirski, 'Britney Spears', *Harper's Bazaar* (front cover), August 2006

here mitigated by the coquettish smile of the former teen star. Photographs from inside the magazine (Fig. 143) conform to the rhetoric of the erotically reclining nude. The singer's pregnancy, emphasised by the positioning of the fabric, provoked however some public complaints: some expressing outright disgust while others bemoaned the sexualised image and the juxtaposition of Spears' ambiguous combination of innocence and sexuality in a 'maternal' body.⁶⁸

In another proposal for a form of pregnant subjectivity, Alice Neel's *Pregnant Maria* (Fig. 144) reclines in a posture interpreted variously as passive or sexually aggressive. Pamela Allara specifically associates the sexuality of *Maria* with discourses of visual bodily penetration:

Although sensuous, *Maria* is definitely not a sex object. No fantasies of possession are possible when her very condition indicates a prior claim to this property. Because her sexual history is inscribed on her body, the male gaze cannot penetrate



Fig. 143: Alexi Lubomirski, 'Britney Spears', *Harpers' Bazaar* (inside page), August 2006

her. *Maria* presents her body to be surveyed, but with the erotic gaze blocked, *her* gaze and its desire dominate. Both with child and sexually active, *Maria* makes no attempt to masquerade as the Virgin Mary, the trope for pregnant women in our culture. Her tranquility is the evidence of the aftermath of sexual activity, not abstinence.⁶⁹

Allara aligns *Maria's* pregnancy with her knowledge of it, and of her own desire, as well as interpreting her intense calmness as sexual satisfaction. I find problematic the assertion that *Maria* is not accessible for a sexually desiring gaze because she has already been sexually 'claimed'. This suggests that for many viewers of these images, pregnancy precludes sexual attractiveness, a suggestion which some of the responses to the Britney Spears photograph (Fig. 142) seems to confirm. It is perhaps not so much her pregnant condition but, like that of Manet's *Olympia*, *Maria's* direct gaze which defies a possessing gaze upon her.⁷⁰



Fig. 144: Alice Neel, 'Pregnant Maria', 1964, Robert Miller Gallery, New York

Lise Clavel reads the images as profoundly dualistic, separating the bodily pregnancy from the psychological state. Indeed, her analysis contradicts Allara's which makes a specific connection between *Maria's* pregnancy, sexuality and self-possessed attitude. Clavel writes:

The woman in this picture is apathetic about both her nakedness and the fact that she is being displayed while pregnant. ...Neel's rendering of the woman's facial expression shows a disjunction between her mind and her body; she seems completely detached from her pregnant self.⁷¹

Where Allara read tranquillity and self-possessed desire in *Maria's* gaze, Clavel reads only apathy.⁷² Denise Bauer suggests yet a third interpretation:

She is not posed for display as convention would have it; rather, she has arranged herself for her own comfort. In this respect she is similar to Valadon's female nudes who "relax into their own bodies... in the absence of the sexual tension of a male gaze."⁷³

Such widely differing and contradictory interpretations recall the responses to images of religious ecstasy mentioned in previous chapters. Pamela Allara writes,

If, since the fifth century B.C., the norm in Western culture has been defined in terms of purity, clarity, and logic, then the hybridized pregnant body cannot fit within its confines, conforming instead to M. M. Bakhtin's definition of the grotesque: "[That] which transgresses its own body... [A] body in the act of becoming, it is continually built, created and builds and creates another body." Because the form of the pregnant body could not be subsumed into the controlling ideal, it was banished from sight throughout Western history and made taboo.⁷⁴

The refusal of the pregnant body to conform to singular modes of visibility did not end with Neel's paintings or Leibovitz's photograph. What is striking is how the pregnant body undermines by participating directly in traditional modes. Even beyond the visibility of her bodily depiction, in her very name *Maria* is inscribed not only in the politico-social structure of American society but also in religious tropes of femininity where both the Virgin and the Magdalene participate in the network of meanings. Finally the various embodiments of the female nude which have travelled throughout the history of art, and within which visual network *Maria* also participates (in its compositional reference to the canonical representations of the nude), make her a deeply paradoxical figure with infinite possible associations and interpretations. In the same way, Demi Moore's indefinably powerful gaze both is inscribed within and resists cultural stereotypes of visibility and femininity (Fig. 141). While Britney Spears' form of response to visual stereotypes of femininity operates in a different way again, the underlying ambiguity of the position she visually assumes – between childhood and adulthood, nature and artificiality, innocence and manipulation – is transgressive, hence the strength of the reactions to the photographs (Fig. 142, Fig. 143). It inscribes again into the visibility of the naked pregnant body an impossibility – the pregnant body in these images remains on the outside of traditional, singular modes of visibility.

What confidence (the interpretation of Allara and Bauer) and apathy (that of Clavel) have in common is a lack of concern with responding to the viewing gaze. Despite the humanity and profound sense of identity throughout Neel's work on the pregnant body, Allara concludes that, 'while the once-taboo subject of the pregnant nude is now artistically acceptable, the question of the relation of the gravid body to female identity remains open.'⁷⁵ This ultimate detachment which these analysts read into *Maria's* pregnant body must in the end construct it as fundamentally passive and incapable of being a site of subjectivity. The traditional discourse of the incongruity of a female bodily subjectivity is reinforced.

Opening the pregnant body

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, there has been a shift in the modes of art representing pregnancy. In Britain alone, the pregnant body has acquired through sculpture in particular a very public, large scale form of visibility. From Marc Quinn's

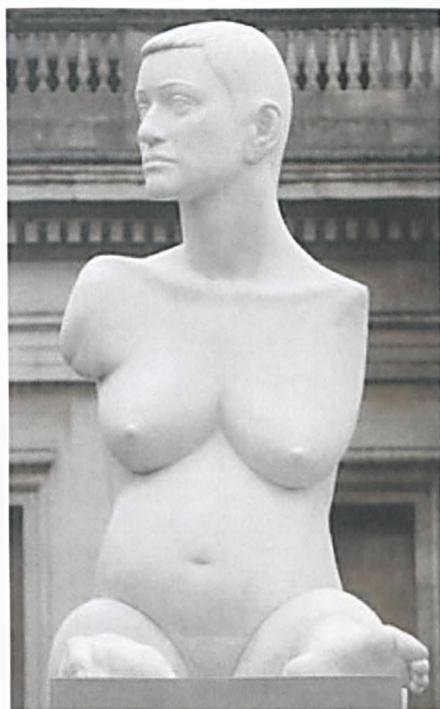


Fig. 145: Marc Quinn, 'Alison Lapper pregnant', 2005, Trafalgar Square, London



Fig. 146: Ron Mueck, 'Pregnant Woman', 2002, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

sculpture of Alison Lapper (Fig. 145), sited in 2005 on the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square, to Ron Mueck's monumentally scaled and ultra-realist *Pregnant Woman* (Fig. 146) displayed in 2003, the pregnant body is above all represented larger than life scale and naked.

Combining these trends is an artwork standing for a third mode of representation of pregnancy. I looked earlier at those representations which appropriate the image of bodily pregnancy as a metaphor for a mental state (Paula Modersohn-Becker, Rogier van der Weyden); secondly, at images whose ambiguous sexuality and relation to the gaze transgresses and disturbs traditional modes of visibility while still failing to engage with a 'pregnant visibility' which could convey an embodied subjectivity. In this third mode the artist finds a solution to the refusal of the pregnant body to reveal its meaning: to literally dissect that body, compulsively accessing its literal interior.

At the Royal Academy's summer exhibition in London in 2006, Damien Hirst contributed a 35-foot bronze sculpture of a pregnant woman entitled *Virgin Mother* to be placed on the front lawn outside the building (Fig. 147).⁷⁶ The sculpture gives the effect of having half of the skin cut and peeled away, to reveal the foetus curled up in the womb, as well as large sections of the 'mother's' muscle, bone and breast tissue (Fig. 148). An earlier

version, outside the Lever House Restaurant in New York, was realistically coloured (Fig. 149).



Fig. 147: Damien Hirst, 'Virgin Mother', 2006, Royal Academy, London



Fig. 148: Damien Hirst, 'Virgin Mother (detail)', 2006, Royal Academy, London



Fig. 149: Damien Hirst, 'Virgin Mother', 2006, Lever House, New York

Opinion about the bronze as reported in the national press varied widely, positive responses usually describing it as 'life-affirming', with among the negative 'I'm fed up with seeing sculptures of pregnant women, although I prefer Marc Quinn's statue of Alison Lapper on the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square to this.'⁷⁷

The sculpture, named the *Virgin Mother*, twists and distorts into all the possible paradoxes of that term – the body thus constructed as part of the discourse of Western Christian imagery but which also inscribes itself into a self-referential canon by adopting the posture of Degas' *Petite Danseuse de quatorze ans* (Fig. 150). This sculpture was itself controversial in its time, and Hirst refers to this posture perhaps intending to draw a parallel between young motherhood, including that of the Virgin in the Christian tradition, and the youth of the ballet dancer already aged and subsumed to the hard world of working life. Through Degas this pose has become associated with abused innocence – the role of the artist however in that interaction remaining obscure. Degas' sculpture was notable for its discretion – its small size, troublingly true to life, as well as the reticence with which the artist presented it to the public (after some delay the bronze was eventually displayed in a glass case, an



Fig. 150: Edgar Degas, 'Petite Danseuse de Quatorze Ans', 1881, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

oddly protective gesture making some critics liken it to a medical specimen.)⁷⁸ Hirst on the other hand presents a huge, monumental public sculpture, the vulnerably confident defiance of the little dancer dislocated into the vastness of a body starkly and literally opened up to view.

The coloured version of the *Virgin Mother* in particular is inscribed into a tradition dating back to Renaissance anatomical art, such as the wax Venuses by Clement Susini mentioned in my second chapter (p. 107): part medical tool and part art, a troubling combination of science and disturbingly traumatic sexuality. An example by Manfredini (Fig. 151) shows a pregnant woman, eyes ecstatically rolled back, peeling back her own skin to reveal her distended uterus.



Fig. 151: Giovan-Battista Manfredini, 'Female bust', 1773-76

The twenty-first century revival of such visibility is not limited, however, to the world of gallery and installation art. The notorious shock exhibition 'Body Worlds' was a move from wax models to 'plastified' human corpses, however now removed from a purely medical context (while maintaining an educational purpose) for an unashamedly morbidly fascinated audience. One of the most controversial exhibits was a pregnant woman whose body was opened to reveal an 8-month old foetus (Fig. 152). Advisors had recommended that the exhibit be curtained off from the rest of the show. Several aspects of this particular body seem to particularly disturb visitors: the question of the circumstances of the deaths of the woman and her foetus and to what extent the woman consented to the procedure of plastination, and the posture in which the body is arranged seeming inappropriately sexually provocative; comments ranging from 'a gruesome hooker' to 'She gives the impression of lying on a bed or couch in expectation of her lover.'⁷⁹

The contrast between the opened and available, even sexual, posture of the mother and the closed, defensive posture of the infant is disconcerting. Where the woman may have consented for her body to be used in this way, to evoke the impossibility for the foetus to 'consent' to this permanent, visible violation is to enter a minefield of ethical debate about the subjecthood of the foetus which is not my concern here. To discuss the woman's

consent to be displayed, however, without considering the other form starkly exposed within her body is to undermine what is occurring in these representations.



Fig. 152: Pregnant woman with 8 month foetus, 'Body Worlds' exhibition

In the Hirst sculpture (Fig. 149), echoing the central imagery of the 'Body Worlds' exhibit, the red nipple, parted lips and blue eyes suggest an unsettlingly fetishised eroticism while the blankness of the mother's face, combined with the staring eyeball of the skinned half of the face, seems to thwart a relationship of identification. The foetus rendered bleakly visible covers from sight. One of the most disturbing details, oddly, is the fingers of the mother – fingers which would have rested curved across the top of her belly are severed brutally along the line of the cross-section. A small element of humanity in this attempt at a protective gesture is annihilated. One woman's response to the Hirst sculpture suggests that such images tend to inspire a defensive



Fig. 153 – see ref. Fig. 149

maternal response: she reflects, 'Since I just had a son seven months ago, it really makes me think that I was happier when he was still inside me.'⁸⁰

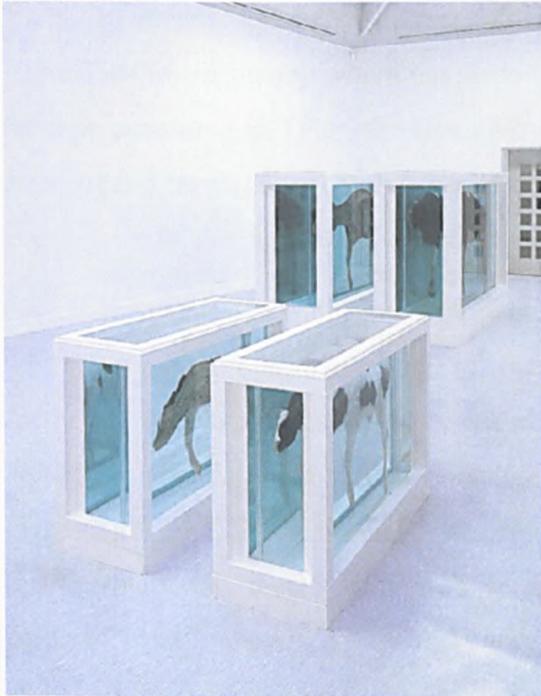


Fig. 154: Damien Hirst, Mother and Child, Divided, 1993, Astrup Fearnley Museum, Oslo

and baby are victim to the visual penetration, their bodies split and opened to the morbidly curious gaze of the gallery visitors, together in their separation just as the linguistic play of the work's title repeats the same ambiguity: the word 'and' connects the two, as does the comma which creates the unit 'Mother and Child' – together sharing their bodily division they are nevertheless also divided from each other.

Hirst's discourse of maternity perhaps articulates and reinforces the perceived 'patriarchal' role – the father as the agent of separation between mother and infant, who literally cut the umbilical cord but moreover, in the structure of classic phallic psychoanalysis, effects the entry of the infant into society. The repeated opening up of the maternal body replays, however, not only a misogynistic treatment of maternity but a fetishistic fascination with the bodily nature of the mother-child relationship which these artworks continually revisit.

The body of the 'pregnant woman' is what constitutes the very existence of this child who will never be born: permanently pregnant yet not pregnant at all, since the etymology of pregnancy is 'before birth', and both mother and child are dead; literally in the case of the Body Worlds exhibit and by implication in the Hirst sculpture. As no birth will occur, both baby and mother are trapped in a state of non-being. The baby will never

Another work by Hirst dealing with maternity, the emblematic *Mother and Child, Divided* (Fig. 154) which won the Turner Prize in 1995, is ruthless in its bleak separation not only of the mother cow from her calf but of their own bodies, both senses included in the work's title. It strikes me as a cruel and rather sadistic reflection on maternity – the split bodies hanging in their preserving fluid suggest a deep hopelessness and emptiness through the emphatic physical separation, marked by the fluid, glass and the calculated distance between the glass cases in the gallery space. Here however both mother

and baby are victim to the visual penetration, their bodies split and opened to the morbidly curious gaze of the gallery visitors, together in their separation just as the linguistic play of the work's title repeats the same ambiguity: the word 'and' connects the two, as does the comma which creates the unit 'Mother and Child' – together sharing their bodily division they are nevertheless also divided from each other.

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be a baby and the mother will never be a mother, yet they clearly do occupy in some sense these sites of identity.

In recent decades it is technology and the visual apparatus of the medicalised experience of pregnancy which has risen to public attention, while the body of the mother (except, according to Tyler, the Demi Moore photograph and its legacy) has been occulted from art and media. Carol Stable noted in 1994 that,

...with the advent of visual technologies, the contents of the uterus have been demystified and have become entirely representable, but pregnant bodies themselves remain concealed.⁸¹

In technological imaging of the foetus in the womb, such as Lennart Nilssen's legendary photographs in *Life* magazine (Fig. 155), the mother is entirely negated with the foetus suspended in a neutral, black space. While this utter denial of the maternal body demonstrates a disavowal of the female body as the site of pregnancy, the literal destruction and rupture of the pregnant maternal body in 'Body Worlds' and Hirst, in order to literally see the foetus which ought to be utterly alien to visibility, is an ultimate proof that the embodied pregnant subject must be disposed of, and violently, in certain expressions of phallic visibility.

This is the other side of the coin of Imogen Tyler's claims for the Demi Moore photograph. While its focus on the woman's pregnant body may confer a form of subjectivity, Tyler's sheen of skin also prohibits any notion of the foetus, effectively stripping it of any potential identity. Rather than claiming that the baby and mother form an indivisible whole, I am suggesting that any attempt within visibility to straightforwardly visually mobilise mother or foetus at the expense of one another is likely to fail. 'Pregnant visibility' cannot exist in these terms. Where we can begin to visualise this encounter is in the unique temporality of pregnancy: in memory, encountered in echoes of the maternal

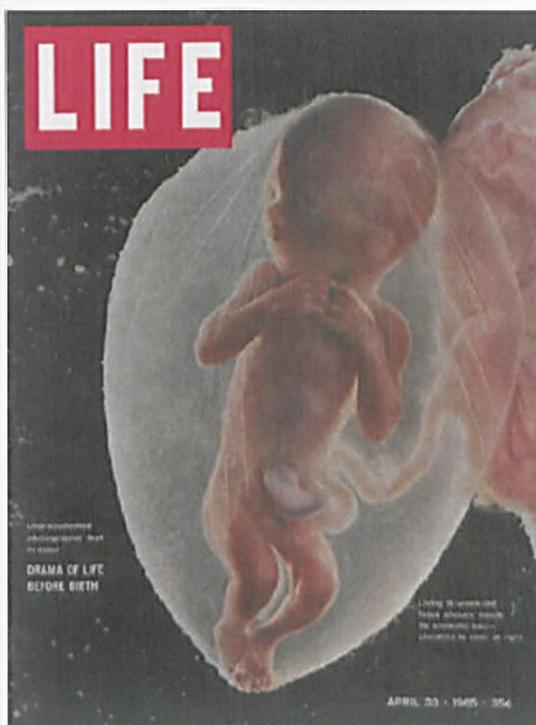


Fig. 155: Lennart Nilssen, '18-week foetus', 1965, 'Life', 30th April

body, and the fore-memory of the child, both temporalities inhabiting the embodied feminine.

Artemisia Gentileschi and a memory of the mother



Fig. 156: detail, see ref. Fig. 78



Fig. 157 – see ref. Fig. 79

In chapter two I examined the origins of the hand posture of Artemisia Gentileschi's *Magdalene* (Fig. 156). Mary Garrard identified references to Michelangelo in the posture, which was used in a modified form by Michelangelo himself in his sculpture 'Night' (Fig. 80) but also in an engraving representing the artist in melancholic or ecstatic reverie (Fig. 157).

Gentileschi also used a very similar hand posture approximately ten years later, in the *Cleopatra* attributed to her in London (Fig. 158). In her analysis of Artemisia Gentileschi and maternal loss, Griselda Pollock suggests the idea that the disturbing deathliness of the head and hand of Cleopatra are specifically referring to the artist's visual memory of seeing her dead mother's body. Prudentia Montone died when her daughter Artemisia was about twelve.

That harshness of the unrelenting, unaestheticised representation of a dead face is perhaps a haunting and haunted memory of her own looking on the dead face of her mother. ... Here we have the sudden relaxation of muscle tension which makes the jaw droop, the eyes roll. Yet it also includes the effects of rigor mortis with that harshly bent wrist, locked in place while the hand itself falls lifelessly.⁸²



Fig. 158: Artemisia Gentileschi, 'Cleopatra', early 1930s, Matthiesen Gallery, London

Gentileschi clearly derives aspects of the posture of both *Cleopatras* from the antique sculpture of *Sleeping Ariadne* (Fig. 40), which was believed to represent Cleopatra at the time. The hand gesture, however, both refers to the antique precedent while also,

in the dramatically increased angle and strangeness of the posture deliberately undermining it. Just as Caravaggio adapted the Pathosformel of the intertwined fingers from the statue of Demosthenes (Fig. 93) to impart the sign of intellectual activity to the Magdalene (Fig. 78), Gentileschi imbues the idealised gesture of the antique figure with a



Fig. 159 – see ref. Fig. 40

striking, uncomfortable suggestion of death; doubly disturbing because of its proximity to, yet distance from, the well-known precedent.

The combination of tension and relaxation is also found in Bernini's *Ludovica Albertoni* (Fig. 3), depicted on the point of death. It is clear, however, that unlike the transitional state of *Ludovica*, *Cleopatra* has been dead for some time. The artist inflicts the emptiness of the body in death upon the viewer, as Pollock describes,

The actual viewers... must see the body in harsh, fierce light, and the long straight line of the cold, white body forces the eye to search for interest in the face and arm, only then to confront death as something done to a body that was once alive – as an absenting, a pallor, a coldness and a violence that, whoever painted that head did not flinch from seeing and making the viewer share.⁸³

Gentileschi's understanding of the visuality of death is directly inspired by the work of Caravaggio. In works such as the *Death of the Virgin* (1606, Musée du Louvre, Paris) the real, empty deadness of the body made the painting controversial (it was rejected by the church for which it had been commissioned.)⁸⁴

Networks of death: a 'Caravaggesque' mother and child

Shortly after the *Death of the Virgin* Caravaggio composed the *Sleeping Cupid* (Fig. 160). Imagery of Cupid asleep had been common since antiquity as a metaphor for the setting aside of worldly pleasures. Here, however, such a dark tone possesses the work that art historical interpretations have not hesitated to associate the infant's prone body with death. Howard Hibbard remarks that 'the pervasiveness of death and dying seems to invade his last secular painting, a *Sleeping Cupid* that looks like a dead baby.'⁸⁵ Clare Robertson described the *Sleeping Cupid* as 'slightly repulsive... the child, depicted almost in monochrome appears diseased, if not dead.'⁸⁶ Elizabeth Cropper goes even further in her analysis, reading not only the signs of death but suggestions of the malicious cruelty of the young God of Love:

This work... has been interpreted allegorically, as an image of the conquest of carnal passion. Its darkness and lack of flesh tone have been taken to signify the death of love... Caravaggio's *Amor* is also a cruel child, dark and tormented, not cherubic. The livid quality of his flesh suggests the very incarnation of malign envy. As, like Marino's Roman pilgrim, we gaze upon him in wonder ..., we sense both fear at the presence of danger and death, and amazement at the artist's power, like that of love itself, to deceive us.⁸⁷

Another commentator argues that 'the choice of decomposing dead Cupid reflects a dialogue with Caravaggio's Renaissance namesake, Michelangelo,' who was famous for having sculpted a *Sleeping Cupid*, now lost, which he had attempted to artificially age to pass off as an antique.⁸⁸ Yet another sees the *Cupid* as a self-reflection upon trends within Caravaggio's own oeuvre, a matured and penitent response to the erotically playful youth of Eros in earlier paintings.⁸⁹



Fig. 160: Caravaggio, 'Sleeping Cupid', 1608, Galleria Palatina (Palazzo Pitti), Florence

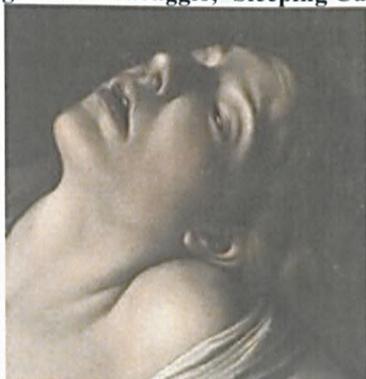


Fig. 161 – detail, see ref. Fig. 27



Fig. 162 – see ref. Fig. 158

The passivity of the small, abandoned body clearly makes it available for all assignments of meaning. From the incongruously limp sensuality of the body to the ambiguous suggestion of both vulnerability and threat, it is clear that 'sleep' cannot adequately describe what this child's painted body evokes. The artist was playing on a previous encounter with ambiguous bodiliness: he clearly reused elements of the slightly earlier *Magdalene* (Fig. 27) in the foreshortening of the face, and details of teeth, nose and eyes of the 1608 *Cupid*. What in the *Cupid* is an unsettlingly dark portrayal of childhood, in fact emerges from the development of an adult female figure, whose apparent abandonment was itself undermined by the suggestion of subjectivity and a 'Caravaggesque' bodiliness found in the moving details of the mouth and eyes.

I am setting up the *Magdalene*, here, as the symbolic mother of this small enigmatic child – whose ‘real’ mother in the legend, Venus, occupies a bodily register of idealised eroticism dramatically distant from the ‘Caravaggesque’ body. The *Magdalene* as the mother with no child cannot ‘give life’ to this infant – so both bodies enter the ‘Caravaggesque’ production of meaning via the suspension of their consciousness, death-in-life.

Artemisia Gentileschi takes the paradoxical maternal and bodily discourse established by Caravaggio in these paintings, and extends the network of encounters still further. The London *Cleopatra* used the same foreshortening and details of teeth, nose and eyes thirty years later (Fig. 158).⁹⁰



Fig. 163: Artemisia Gentileschi, ‘Sleeping Venus’, 1625-30, Barbara Piasecka Johnson Foundation, Princeton, New Jersey

Where Pollock saw traces of a lost mother in the *Cleopatra*, the relationship with the *Cupid* inscribes the discourse of the lost *child* into the image of the female body. Indeed, Gentileschi borrowed the bodily posture of the *Cupid* for a *Sleeping Venus* (Fig. 163). The body was, in Garrard’s terms ‘more idealised than is usual for Artemisia’.⁹¹ The face, in perfect profile, is almost incongruously peaceful, with a slight smile. The interest in the painting, however, lies in the relationship between the sleeping Venus and her young son, who a commentator describes as ‘unsuccessfully attempting to awaken the sleeping goddess’.⁹² Keith Christiansen writes, ‘Cupid stands behind his mother’s couch and raises a peacock feather to fan her’ while in a footnote expanding that, ‘Matthiesen has described

Cupid as trying to waken his mother. While artists often depicted a mischievous Cupid who willingly teased his mother, there is, however, none of that playfulness in the present picture.⁹³ Christiansen and Mann also criticise Gentileschi's weak portrayal of a passive woman, and conclude that she was pandering to male patrons.⁹⁴ While this may certainly be



Fig. 164: detail, see ref. Fig. 163

true, they may however have bypassed the more subtle psychological interaction at work within this painting, which is the relationship between Venus and her son Cupid (Fig. 164). While he is not playful or teasing, this does not have to mean that he is not trying to wake her. The preoccupied and serious little boy gazes on his mother's closed eyes and passive face, on her absence. The uncertainty as to what he is doing, and the suggestion of the child's own doubt as to his mother's state as revealed in his grave expression, transfers itself to the composition as a whole. The young Cupid gazes upon the still face of his mother who inhabits both a gracefully erotic woman's body, and the haunting memory of a child's deathly one from Caravaggio's 1608 composition –

which is, in an added twist, his own. These dark suggestions aim to demonstrate that Artemisia Gentileschi's choices of iconographic elements and sourced postures were not accidental or random, and that discourses of maternal and bodily desire and loss are inserted throughout her oeuvre.

The Spada *Madonna*

In the *Spada Madonna* (Fig. 165) Gentileschi also emphasised the saddened gaze of the child upon the maternal face, with eyes closed. Here reversing the traditional portrayal, where the Virgin Mary gazes sadly at the infant Jesus as she foresees his fate, in the

anxious gravity of the Christ child the Spada *Madonna* renders the loss operating in the other direction.⁹⁵



Fig. 165, Artemisia Gentileschi, 'Madonna and Child', 1610-11, Galleria Spada, Rome



Fig. 166 – detail, see ref. Fig. 165

Art historical analysis often describes the mother as responding directly to the child: for Christiansen and Mann 'she in turn bows her head in sympathetic response'.⁹⁶ Opposing this work to the earlier London *Cleopatra* (Fig. 158), Lilian Zirpolo argues that: 'the Spada Madonna, on the contrary, shows the maternal body as very much alive, as able to conceive, gestate, give birth and nurture – Gentileschi's compensatory fantasy of perfect motherhood.'⁹⁷ I do not read this image in quite the same way. Although Zirpolo describes the *Madonna's* expression as 'that of a woman who derives great pleasure from mothering,' the mother's response to the infant is ambiguous: she offers the breast and her body leans tenderly around the infant, but her closed eyes refuse the infant's gaze and touch.⁹⁸ The baby is not interested in the breast, but gazes gravely at the face which he strokes with one hand, as if to attempt to elicit the mother's gaze and response. While her arm encloses him, her other hand drops lifelessly behind the infant. Christiansen and Mann see Artemisia's Spada *Madonna* as 'based directly on' her father Orazio's Bucharest *Madonna*, Fig. 167, arguing that 'the Virgin's left hand may derive from her father's painting'.⁹⁹ While

compositionally similar, the left hand in the Bucharest painting clearly interacts with and gathers the fabric around the baby, whereas the hand in the Spada *Madonna* is limp. The right hand of the Spada *Madonna* likewise fails to engage convincingly with the breast, while the Bucharest *Madonna*'s handling of her breast is strikingly physical and naturalistic down to the imprints of the fingers in the soft flesh. On the other hand, although the much younger baby in the Bucharest painting gazes up at his mother with wide eyes, the mother's own response is calm and detached in comparison with the intensity and tenderness of the interaction in the Spada *Madonna*. Christiansen and Mann, while noticing the differences between the two paintings, attribute them to immaturity in Artemisia's style. They write,



Fig. 167: Orazio Gentileschi, 'Madonna and Child', 1609, Muzeul National de Arta al Romaniei, Bucharest

Artemisia's picture, in the artful pose of the child, with his self-conscious gesture of affection, or the generalised treatment of the Virgin's face and bland description of the drapery, seems decidedly tentative and timid when compared with the extreme naturalism of her father's work. Was she, at this stage, not yet permitted to work directly from the model? ...Artemisia's arrangement integrates elegance of pose with an affective use of gesture – traits that reappear in the artist's mature production but that here strike a distinctly juvenile and unresolved note.¹⁰⁰

Referring to a related attribution which she makes to Artemisia (a *Madonna and Child* usually attributed to Orazio, Fig. 168) Mary Garrard remarks, 'That the gentle and ideal maternal love exhibited in the ex-Matthiesen *Madonna* should never have recurred in Artemisia's oeuvre is not surprising, considering the traumatic personal events of 1611-12.'¹⁰¹ The rape and subsequent trial that Artemisia Gentileschi underwent during these years, Garrard suggests, permanently terminated a period of creative innocence or gentleness in the artist's career. As Pollock puts it, however, 'while the rape remains crucial for a study of this artist, I want temporarily to displace its trauma by focusing instead on another, unacknowledged in the studies on Artemisia Gentileschi: maternal loss.'¹⁰² Tracing



Fig. 168: Orazio Gentileschi, 'Madonna and Child', c. 1607, Barbara Piasecka Johnson Foundation, New York (formerly Matthiesen Gallery, London)

Gentileschi's evocation of the maternal throughout her career, before and beyond the traumatic episode of the rape and its aftermath, there is no need to read only for a breach – which would reductively site all of Gentileschi's oeuvre in respect of the rape – but for continuity. I suggest that in both of Artemisia Gentileschi's depictions of *Cleopatra* (Fig. 126 and Fig. 158), as well as elsewhere in her oeuvre, the artist continues an exploration of the maternal embodied subject and an engagement with maternal loss and identity which she initiated when still a teenager and attempting, through her art, to come to terms with her mother's death.

In all the contradictory signs in the Spada *Madonna* which make it so gently poignant, Gentileschi presents a mother who is both present and absent in the very act of maternal care and love. This image perhaps functions as a response to Mary Garrard's assertion that, 'in Artemisia's world, female figures hammer and paint, grab and hold, push and shove, with extraordinary ease. Their hands and arms are exceptionally strong...'¹⁰³ Here, on the contrary, it is the specific passivity and emptiness of the *Madonna's* hands which hold the key to the composition as a whole: which adds another dimension to Garrard's assertion that hands 'are the locus of agency, both literally and symbolically.'¹⁰⁴

Rather than reconstituting the fantasy of a perfect mother as argued by Zirpolo, Gentileschi is here evoking the combination of loss and desire of the young woman who had lost her own mother in early adolescence.¹⁰⁵ The described 'juvenile and unresolved' and 'timid' nature of the early Madonnas occurs because the artist was, precisely, working and reworking the nature of the child's mourning of the loss of her mother. Thus the infant's gesture of the Spada *Madonna* is 'self-conscious', not from artistic naivety, but precisely because it is just that: a knowing, impossible reaching for a mother who, although she is so powerfully still there, has already gone.

The two *Cleopatras*, for Pollock, represent the older Gentileschi's encounter with the memory of the body of the mother and with death. She describes the Milan *Cleopatra* (Fig. 126) as 'the omnipotence and plenitude of a queenly, that is idealised, body of the

powerful mother... the fantasised mother is shown forever held by the painting “before death”, kept on the verge of leaving life, still just there.’¹⁰⁶ In contrast, the London *Cleopatra* is an essay in the embodiment of death itself. For Pollock this body makes the viewer ‘confront death as something done to a body that was once alive – as an absencing, a pallor, a coldness and a violence that, whoever painted that head did not flinch from seeing and making the viewer share.’¹⁰⁷

We have seen how, in the *Sleeping Venus* (Fig. 163), Gentileschi combined the association with a dead child (Caravaggio’s *Cupid*) with the suggestion of the dead mother in the closed unresponsive eyes and the child’s grave gaze. The artist was performing, within this painting, both the past and future of the female body: its past as a child who, subject to mortality itself, must gaze upon the body of its dead mother while seeing its own mortality reflected in that body’s forms.

If her notion of maternal memory and visibility altered in her work of the 1620s onwards, it is not solely in response to the rape. As Nancy Chodorow argued, ‘mothering is invested with a mother’s own conflictual, ambivalent, yet powerful need for her own mother.’¹⁰⁸ In 1617, Artemisia Gentileschi gave birth to her first daughter, whom she called Prudentia after her late mother.¹⁰⁹ In the birth of her daughter, there is some sense that a cycle has been completed: this play of feminine and maternal bodies lies at the heart of the ‘pregnant visibility’ which is Gentileschi’s visual negotiation of the multiplicity of the feminine experience as well as of her work on embodiment, memory, femininity and subjectivity. As Rosemary Betterton points out, ‘the (m)other with whom she is in relation (or opposition) is not her own mother, but her imagined self as mother.’¹¹⁰

Artemisia Gentileschi’s ‘Caravaggesque’

In the Seville *Magdalene*, the elements of Artemisia Gentileschi’s theorisation of femininity are reunited. The paradoxical body of the Magdalene registers the suspension between awareness and abandon, between grief and reverie, strength and vulnerability,





Fig. 169 – see ref. Fig. 156

which the phenomenon of spiritual experience while the bent wrist and hand operate as a powerful Pathosformel to reference a memory of the mother's body. Far from being a fragmentation of the maternal body, the bent wrist is a cipher of memory. In a painting which otherwise owes much to the precedent by Caravaggio (Fig. 27), Gentileschi chose not to reproduce the *Magdalene's* intertwined fingers to suggest subjectivity and intellectual presence, instead adding an element which would more firmly inscribe this *Magdalene* in a discourse of death. This Pathosformel therefore doubly contains, alongside the bodily memory of the mother, a reference to the daughter's creativity; it aligns her image with great melancholic artists and saints from Michelangelo to St. Helena. Not only is this *Magdalene* an evocation of the mother, it is also a self-portrait.

The partly open eyes and mouth, elements which had travelled through Caravaggio's *Magdalene in ecstasy* and *Sleeping Cupid*, not only produce a moment suspended in time, between life and death, but also enable a concept of the body which transgresses phallic modes of viewing. Here the 'Caravaggesque' body which I proposed in earlier chapters is fully deployed to ironically articulate a bodily subjectivity by undermining the signs of passivity.

Artemisia Gentileschi's *Magdalene* is not physically metaphorically pregnant in the sense understood by Penny Jolly, although Jolly's identification of this trend, if correct, may well have left traces in this *Magdalene*'s meaning. It does, however, in the reference to both Caravaggio's lone *Magdalenes*, but especially in the Rome composition (Fig. 171)



Fig. 170 – see ref. Fig. 27



Fig. 171 – see ref. Fig. 33

bear traces of what I have argued here is a form of visibility which, via the 'pregnant moment' and the embodied past, present and future of the feminine subject, evokes an emerging from the mother, living as a daughter in relation to that mother, and becoming a mother in one's own right, with all the paradoxes of bodily identity and identification which such moves entail. To achieve this experience in artistic representation involves subverting the visual discourse of eroticised femininity, and Artemisia Gentileschi accomplished this in the *Magdalene* through its insertion into a visual discourse of religious ecstasy which already, in its 'Caravaggesque' articulation, had traversed and reassigned traditional tropes of the body and modes of viewing.

In the first chapter of this study I used the metaphor of the mirror to indicate how the image of Mary Magdalene could perform a visual embodied subjectivity, by appropriating the surface of the mirror and the complexity of its operation in visibility, in

order to demonstrate an ironic complicity in the fictiveness of the painted space itself. Through the medium of the gaze, the *Magdalenes* of Savoldo (Fig. 24) and of Caravaggio (Fig. 27) became agents in their own objectification, active in their own passivity.

Luce Irigaray uses the metaphor of the mirror to describe the paradoxical notion of selfhood produced in the maternal construct:

You look at yourself in the mirror. And your mother is already there. And soon your daughter... Between the two what are you?... Just a scansion: the time when one becomes the other.¹¹¹

In the *Magdalene* Gentileschi reinstates the body of the woman as daughter and mother as more than a 'scansion' or site of transition, but as a body in her own right, marked by the future and past of the mother. In a sense Gentileschi is reclaiming the bodiliness of the mother, by embodying a state of pre-motherhood in the figure of the Magdalene, and at the same time evoking the lost body of her own mother. Julia Kristeva's paradigm of maternity is structured by absence: the distancing which is necessary on the mother's part in order to permit the liberation of not only the subjecthood of the child but its creativity. She says:

By her gradual reduction of her [maternal] passion and/or by her aptitude for sublimation, the mother enables the child to interiorise and represent *not the mother* ("nothing can represent the maternal object", writes André Green), but *the absence of the mother*: if, and only if, she leaves the child free to appropriate maternal thought, by recreating it in its own way of thinking-representing. The "good-enough mother" would be the one who knows who knows to become absent in order to make way for the *pleasure*, for the child, of *thinking the mother*.¹¹²

Kristeva cites the case of Colette, whose gift for poetry she attributes to her distanced mother:

Colette's mother *succeeds*, indeed, even if she does not see her daughter: she does not abandon her, since she has transmitted to her her own passion for language. (Sido wrote superb letters to her daughter: Colette said that the writer of the family was her mother and not "the great Colette"! Isn't the capacity to share passion via the flavour of language a freer and more protecting presence than the the bodily struggle with a dominating mother, for her daughter who would then never stop needing it?¹¹³

Applying Kristeva's logic to Artemisia Gentileschi leads me to conclude that the artistic and creative power shown by the daughter is profoundly linked up with the mother – that even the mother's absence plays a vital role, in a sense, in liberating the daughter's creativity.

I would like to pursue a final speculation or projection based on this Warburgian tracing. I find it possible to ask myself if Gentileschi's imagery of the feminine does not rather suggest that the inspiration for her creativity is a negotiation of the mother's physical body so that it remains embodied, a physical existence within the body of the daughter-becoming-mother: the daughter's intellectual activity and embodied subjectivity supported – indeed in the *Magdalene*, literally propped up – by the bodily presence of the mother's memory.

Coda

From the imagery of the ecstatic saint, and along the journey back to re-encounter Mary Magdalene, this thesis has encountered the relationship between word and image. Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne* atlas (Fig. 43) proposed a nonverbal rhetoric of the image where the juxtapositions and intervals encouraged the images to interact.

From the outset, I was determined that the claims made in this thesis about the female body and its paradoxical relationship to passivity would be relevant not only to the art of the Italian Renaissance and Baroque, the structural origins of this thesis, but could also extend to be applicable to visual culture in a more general sense, and that the juxtapositions made, whether in the fields of film, advertising, photography, painting, or sculpture, would not propose straightforward equivalences but rather trace commonalities, identify repeating phenomena which occur in widely different contexts within the Western visual systems in which the female body participates.

While a literal application, as methodology, of the 'unburdened' visual networks proposed by the *Mnemosyne* project was not realistic, by drawing into contrast and comparison within my thesis aspects of visual culture from varying periods and media, I make a deliberate attempt to reveal the operation of discourses of femininity and the body in the Foucauldian sense.

The concern of the thesis overall has been to find a solution to the double bind expressed at the end of Chapter Two. After the scene-setting of Chapter One, where the limitations of traditional modes of art history were revealed in conjunction with a proposal for a transgressive passive visual subjectivity in the form of the Magdalene and the mirror, Chapter Two returned to the most iconic of all female forms in art, the antique Venus. The chapter continued by gradually revealing discourses of fetishistic modes of viewing through sculpture, photography and even performance art which engages with notions of femininity, surface and interior, but ultimately concluded with a double bind: that feminist art attempting to subvert the fetishistic discourses of the visibility of the body often ultimately remains within its language and terms of reference, merely reproducing the problematic without proposing a solution: the only alternative appears to be invisibility, a refusal to participate in a visual culture, which position can only be unsatisfactory. The quest at the heart of the thesis, therefore, was to identify a form of visual subjectivity articulated

through the female body, operating within visual culture, but going beyond and acting independently of its limitations and codifications as defined by patriarchal structures.

Hence the return to Mary Magdalene: a figure remaining on the horizon throughout the thought processes developed here, ultimately she appears as a kind of 'Everywoman' in the unexpected sense of providing the site for the deepest possibilities of the female body within visuality and culture. In Chapter Three the focus shifted away from the Magdalene's reflection and gaze, and the identificatory networks of the 'mirror' concept sited at the place of the body (which was the concern of the second half of Chapter One), to an approach strongly based within the interactions of the body itself and its temporality. Gradually through the chapter the question of subjective presence operating via bodily temporality was developed.

From the intellectual tension of the Magdalene's intertwined fingers, via the spasms and paralyses of Augustine in the Salpêtrière, to the mastery of poised and paradoxical temporality in the photography of Cindy Sherman, the chapter concluded by drawing together this temporal discourse to the concepts of bodily surface, interior, substance, subjectivity and gaze developed previously, in the trope of fire and flame. It is at the moment of death that the final juxtaposition, between the face of Ingrid Bergman as the dying Joan of Arc, and the sculpted face of Bernini's *Teresa*, provides a culmination for the speculation of the thesis, by once and for all disabling binary notions of pleasure, pain, inside, outside, life and death, within which the female bodies represented so far had struggled.

Carried along the trace I have laid out in these visual encounters and interactions, and lent an impetus of movement by Warburg's 'bewegte Beiwerke', the *pathos formula*, like an electric current, activates according to the specific circumstances allowing it to exist. By framing together a varied and open visual archive, I have proposed a provisional solution to the problems posed throughout this thesis: phallic modes of viewing and centuries of objectification of the female body which seemed to exclude it from an embodied visual presence.

The feminist possibility which is developed through the final chapter draws upon transformative events in women's lives, bodies, and subjectivities – from daughterhood, to pregnancy, to motherhood – to shape new questions that can then be posed to images in a scholarly sense. To move away from concepts of the female body based on abandonment, passivity, and sexual vulnerability, and to deter visualities of femininity based on surface,

the shell, or the formless interior, requires a re-thinking of the nature of feminine embodiment via the discourses of the lived body, and the paradoxical temporality and corporeality which that entails. Rather than moments of intensity, spasm, or crisis, the visual discourse of ecstasy as traced here rather resolves into stillness, a profoundly paradoxical instance of Warburg's 'bewegte Beiwerke' whose movement, passion and intensity is entirely encapsulated in the resolved stillness of maternal memory and embodied creativity.

Notes to Chapter One

- ¹ Quoted by I. Lavin, *Bernini and the Unity of the Visual Arts* (New York/London: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 139-140.
- ² Teresa's *Life* was written before 1567, under the direction of her confessor
- ³ Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto/Buffalo/London: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2002), pp. 133-174. The exhibition in question was 'Moordwijven!/Lady Killers!' at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, in 1998.
- ⁴ Bal, *Travelling Concepts*, pp. 154-155.
- ⁵ Bal, *Travelling Concepts*, p. 148.
- ⁶ Cited by Karen Edis Barzman, 'Devotion and Desire: The Reliquary Chapel of Maria Maddalena De Pazzi', *Art History*, 15, no. 2, June (1992), p. 185.
- ⁷ A. B. Sharpe, 'Mysticism: Its True Nature and Value', *Jacques Maritain Center, University of Notre Dame, Indiana*, (1910). Available: <http://www.nd.edu/Departments/Maritain/etext/mystic.htm>. Accessed 6 June 2003.
- ⁸ Sharpe, 'Mysticism: Its True Nature and Value'.
- ⁹ Sharpe, 'Mysticism: Its True Nature and Value'.
- ¹⁰ Louis Marin, *Sublime Poussin (Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics)*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Chicago/London: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 71.
- ¹¹ Marin, *Sublime Poussin*, p. 72.
- ¹² Louis Marin, *To Destroy Painting*, trans. by Mette Hjort (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
- ¹³ Quotation from André Félibien, cited by Marin, *To Destroy Painting*, p. 3.
- ¹⁴ Norman Bryson, 'To Destroy Painting - Book Review', *ArtForum*, 34, no. 3 (1995). Available: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_n3_v34/ai_17866050/print. Accessed 6 June 2007.
- ¹⁵ Marin, *Sublime Poussin*, pp. 72-73.
- ¹⁶ Cited by Michael Fried, *Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Frank Stella* (Meridien, Conn.: Meridien Gravure Co., 1965), p. 5.
- ¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1994), p. 51.
- ¹⁸ Marin, *To Destroy Painting*, pp. 97-98.
- ¹⁹ Marin, *To Destroy Painting*, pp. 97-98. Referring to arguments in Fried, *Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Frank Stella*.
- ²⁰ Marin, *To Destroy Painting*, p. 7.
- ²¹ Marin, *To Destroy Painting*, p. 15.
- ²² Karen Shelley Perlove, *Bernini and the Idealization of Death: The Blessed Ludovica Albertoni and the Altieri Chapel* (Philadelphia/University Park: Penn State University Press, 1990). Cited by Nigel Llewellyn, 'The Cardinal and the Nun, Their Sculptor and His Brother', *Art History*, 15, no. March (1992), p. 114.
- ²³ Llewellyn, 'The Cardinal and the Nun', p. 114.
- ²⁴ John Pope-Hennessy, *Italian High Renaissance and Baroque Sculpture: An Introduction to Italian Sculpture* (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1985), pp. 30-31.

- ²⁵ The unfinished struggling statues (probably also for 'Liberal Arts') in the Galleria Accademia in Florence convey in a powerful, moving and disturbing fashion this sensation of being trapped in matter.
- ²⁶ Pope-Hennessy, *Italian High Renaissance and Baroque Sculpture*, p. 31.
- ²⁷ Llewellyn, 'The Cardinal and the Nun', pp. 111-115.
- ²⁸ Giovanni Careri, 'Envols d'amour: la dévotion baroque dans le montage de la peinture, de l'architecture et de la sculpture du dernier Bernin'. Thesis director: Louis Marin (Doctoral Thesis, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, 1989.)
- ²⁹ Cited by Frank Sommer, 'The Iconography of Action: Bernini's Ludovica Albertone', *Art Quarterly*, 33 (1970), p. 31.
- ³⁰ Sommer, 'Iconography of Action'.
- ³¹ Sommer, 'Iconography of Action', p. 35.
- ³² Careri, 'Envols d'amour', p. 204. '[Un emblème ne peut pas] traduire, sans reste et dans un langage stable, ce qui est défini justement par son instabilité et par sa singularité.'
- ³³ Careri, 'Envols d'amour', p. 204. '...l'ambiguïté étudiée de la posture de Lodovica provoque encore chez le spectateur un état d'interrogation inquiète'.
- ³⁴ Goporta.com, 'Santa Maria Della Vittoria - Rome, Italy', *Italian Adventures*. Available: <http://www.goporta.com/rome/StMariaVitt.htm>. Accessed 8 June 2007.
- ³⁵ TravelandLeisure.com, 'Rome', (2003). Available: <http://www.travelandleisure.com/destination/rome.cfm>. Accessed 6 June 2003.
- ³⁶ Shân Short, 'Come Again? Bernini's Cornaro Chapel as a Site/Sight of the Writing of Male Desire', *Australian Journal of Art*, 8 (1989-90), p. 93.
- ³⁷ Cited by Short, 'Come Again?', p. 84.
- ³⁸ Cited by Short, 'Come Again?', p. 86.
- ³⁹ Cited by Short, 'Come Again?', p. 86.
- ⁴⁰ Cited by Short, 'Come Again?', p. 86.
- ⁴¹ Jean-Noël Vuarnet, *Extases Féminines* (Paris: Hâtier, 1991), p. 9. 'Mémorial de l'énigmatique féminité'
- ⁴² Vuarnet, *Extases Féminines*, p. 119. 'Quand nous parlons de Thérèse d'Avila, nous ne savons jamais bien de quelle Thérèse nous parlons: de celle qui vécut à Avila, de celle qui représenta ses propres extases dans d'extraordinaires méditations romanesques, ou de celle que représentèrent tant d'artistes, du Bernin à Klossowski. Cette équivoque, qui, plus que de raison, nous la rend équivoque, fait bien sur que nous l'aimons - non certes d'un amour bien pur ni bien honnête mais de celui du moins que nous pouvons avoir.'
- ⁴³ Vuarnet, *Extases Féminines*, p. 135. 'Car le Bernin, délictueusement, sait ce que donnent à voir les fiancées, les violées, les enlevées: un spectacle. C'est de ce spectacle que, dans la position bien connue du voyeur, nous jouissons après lui.'
- ⁴⁴ Vuarnet, *Extases Féminines*, p. 165. 'Rien de plus beau que le visage féminin de la jouissance, rien de plus double. Il suffit d'en regarder un, même en peinture ou en photo. La ressemblance est frappante, ça ne fait pas de doute: toutes ressemblent à... Angèle, Catherine ou Thérèse...'
- ⁴⁵ Jacques Lacan, 'God and the Jouissance of the Woman, Seminar Xx of the Series 'Encore'', (1972-3). Cited by Jacques Lacan and the *École Freudienne, Feminine Sexuality*, ed. by Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, (London: Macmillan Press, 1983), p. 147.
- ⁴⁶ Cited by *Feminine Sexuality*, ed. by Mitchell and Rose., p. 145.
- ⁴⁷ Cited by *Feminine Sexuality*, ed. by Mitchell and Rose., p. 146.
- ⁴⁸ Cited by *Feminine Sexuality*, ed. by Mitchell and Rose., p. 147.

- ⁴⁹ Cited by *Feminine Sexuality*, ed. by Mitchell and Rose., p. 144.
- ⁵⁰ Careri, 'Envolts d'amour', p. 216.
- ⁵¹ Respectively: Simon Schama, 'When Stone Came to Life', *Guardian*, Saturday, September 16th (2006). Available: <http://arts.guardian.co.uk/print/0,,329577636-110428,00.html>. Accessed 14 June 2007. Harry Polkinhorn, 'Remembering to Forget', in *Perspectives on Perception: Philosophy, Art, and Literature*, ed. by Mary Ann Caws (New York: Peter Lang, 1989).
- ⁵² Michael Call, 'Boxing Teresa: The Counter-Reformation and Bernini's Cornaro Chapel', *Woman's Art Journal*, 18, no. 1 (1997), p. 38.
- ⁵³ Call, 'Boxing Teresa', p. 38.
- ⁵⁴ Call, 'Boxing Teresa', p. 34.
- ⁵⁵ Call, 'Boxing Teresa', p. 34.
- ⁵⁶ Emile Mâle, *L'art Religieux Après Le Concile De Trente: Etude Sur L'iconographie De La Fin Du Xvie Siècle, Du Xviiie, Du Xviii Siècle, Italie, France, Espagne, Flandres* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1932), p. 165. '...l'œuvre du Bernin, malgré toutes les précautions qu'il a prises pour la mettre en valeur, se voit mal. Placé assez haut et éloigné du spectateur, le groupe ne laisse pas discerner l'expression véritable des visages que la photographie nous a révélée.'
- ⁵⁷ Charles de Brosse, who said in 1740 with reference to the *St. Teresa*, 'Si c'est ici l'amour divin, je le connais'. This joke is often cited in art historical literature on the sculpture. A review of Richard Spear's book on Guido Reni remarks, 'De Brosse's joke about Bernini's *St Theresa* is trotted out once more...' in order to criticise Spear's irreverence for the sculpture. See Helen Langdon, 'Review: The 'Divine' Guido. Religion, Sex, Money and Art in the World of Guido Reni by Richard E. Spear', *The Burlington Magazine*, 142, no. 1163 (2000), p. 115.
- ⁵⁸ Footnote in the original.
- ⁵⁹ Mâle, *L'art Religieux*, p. 165. 'Depuis le trop spirituel président de Brosse, il est de bon ton de parler de ce groupe de Sainte-Marie-de-la-Victoire avec un sourire. Ces sous-entendus eussent fort étonné les contemporains du Bernin et le Bernin tout le premier, car l'artiste avait voulu de tout son cœur glorifier celle qui fut la pureté même et qui ne sut jamais ce que pouvaient être les troubles de l'instinct. (Elle n'eut jamais à lutter contre les tentations et, quand ses religieuses, nous dit le procès de canonisation, lui faisaient connaître les leurs, elle les renvoyait à leur confesseur, à cause de son ignorance.) L'erreur vient en partie de ce que l'œuvre du Bernin, malgré toutes les précautions qu'il a prises pour la mettre en valeur, se voit mal. Placé assez haut et éloigné du spectateur, le groupe ne laisse pas discerner l'expression véritable des visages que la photographie nous a révélée. Contrairement à ce que l'on répète, le sourire de l'ange n'est pas malicieux; il respire au contraire une bonté ingénue qui se nuance d'une légère tristesse, car il sait qu'avec la joie céleste il apporte aussi la souffrance. Quant à la sainte, il y a sur ses traits douloureux, sur ses yeux presque fermés, sur sa bouche entr'ouverte une gravité qui est celle de la mort. Son expression est celle d'une autre sainte du Bernin, la bienheureuse Albertona (sic.), qu'il a représentée mourant dans un transport d'amour céleste. Fidèle interprète de sainte Thérèse, le Bernin a exprimé ici la défaillance de la nature succombant sous le choc du divin.'
- ⁶⁰ In fact, despite the photographic close-ups beside the text in the book, which Mâle assured us would put right the 'mistake', it is difficult to conclude that the face of Teresa, or indeed that of the angel, is any less suggestive and ambiguous for seeing it close-up, including in postcards I bought in the chapel itself in 2001. (The images here are not the same as those provided by Mâle.)

- ⁶¹ Pierre Cabanne, *L'art Classique Et Le Baroque* (Paris: Larousse, 1999), p. 16. 'Ce groupe sculpté met en scène, avec une sensualité d'autant plus provocante qu'au même moment *les Exercices* de saint Ignace recommandaient de vivre la foi par tous les sens et par toute l'imagination, sainte Thérèse percée par l'ange de la flèche de l'amour divin. Mais les nombreux commentateurs qui ont fait état de l' 'érotisme' de l'attitude de la sainte se sont néanmoins trompés car la bulle de canonisation fait état de la vision dont sainte Thérèse a bénéficié, et toute confusion entre amour humain et amour divin ne peut que dénaturer le sens de cette œuvre, dépourvue, selon l'Eglise, de toute ambiguïté.'
- ⁶² Caterina Napoleone, 'Celestial Delights: The Cornaro Chapel', *FMR*, no. 83, (1996), p. 26.
- ⁶³ Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 220.
- ⁶⁴ Steinberg, *Sexuality of Christ*, p. 267.
- ⁶⁵ Charles Hope, 'Ostentatio Genitalium', *London Review of Books*, November 15 - December 6 (1984). Cited by Steinberg, *Sexuality of Christ*, p. 349.
- ⁶⁶ The debate also brings up classic questions of anachronism – can Steinberg, for instance, discuss 'sexuality' in regard to the Renaissance at all, when such a concept did not exist in the form we use it today. Criticisms of Steinberg, *Sexuality of Christ*. along these lines were made by Arnold I. Davison, 'Sex and the Emergence of Sexuality', *Critical Inquiry*, 14, Autumn (1987), who follows Michel Foucault in this concept of sexuality (see Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. by Robert Hurley (Penguin, 1998), vol. I. Steinberg defends a straightforward use of the term, in common usage in the sense of 'the quality of being sexual or having (possessing) sex'. Steinberg, *Sexuality of Christ*, pp. 327-328. A related criticism is that made by Caroline Walker Bynum who argues 'there is reason to think that medieval people saw Christ's penis not primarily as a sexual organ but as the object of circumcision and therefore as the wounded, bleeding flesh with which it was associated in painting and in text'. Caroline Walker Bynum, 'The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages: A Reply to Leo Steinberg', in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*, (New York: Zone Books, 1992), pp. 79-117. Steinberg replies with textual and visual evidence to the contrary as well as a sharp deconstruction of the language used: he queries the generalisations of 'medieval people'. He elsewhere deconstructs the choice of terms 'saw' and 'as' in Bynum's sentence 'Theologians saw the wound in Christ's side as a breast' in terms of the misuse of terms related to visuality. In this sentence they are operating inappropriately as metaphors within a text-based analysis which would ascribe onto visual artworks interpretations which, for Steinberg at least, are not necessarily easily visually forthcoming. Steinberg, *Sexuality of Christ*, pp. 381-382.
- ⁶⁷ Careri, 'Envols d'amour', p. 241. '...l'observateur se demande ce qui arrive à l'intérieur du corps convulsé de Lodovica: souffre-t-elle ou jouit-t-elle...?'
- ⁶⁸ Careri, 'Envols d'amour', p. 216. '...la plupart des historiens de l'art se sont sentis obligés de rappeler que Bernini était profondément pieux et que ses saintes et ses bienheureuses sont des grandes mystiques, et non pas des femmes extrêmement sensuelles. La sensualité manifeste de la sculpture semble pour certains aujourd'hui contraster avec la sacralité du lieu dans lequel elle est exposée...'
- ⁶⁹ Moshe Barasch, 'The Tossed-Back Head: The Ambiguity of a Gesture in Renaissance Art', in *Spiegel Und Gleichnis: Festschrift Für Jacob Taubes*, ed. by Norbert W. Bolz and Wolfgang Hübener, (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1983), pp. 12-13.

- ⁷⁰ Barasch, 'Tossed-Back Head', p. 19.
- ⁷¹ Barasch, 'Tossed-Back Head', p. 20.
- ⁷² Bernard Aikema suggests a similar interpretation of an 'erotic saint' based on moral paradox in his essay on Titian's *Pitti Magdalene*, Bernard Aikema, 'Titian's Mary Magdalen in the Palazzo Pitti: an ambiguous painting and its critics', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 57, 1994).
- ⁷³ Careri, 'Envols d'amour', p. 212. 'Au lieu de se demander comment une œuvre 'met en œuvre' un récit évangélique, un mystère ou un processus spirituel, on se limite à y reconnaître le récit ou la figure comme s'il s'agissait de la traduction, sans restes, d'un récit ou d'une figure pré-existants.'
- ⁷⁴ Mieke Bal, *Reading "Rembrandt": Beyond the Word-Image Opposition*, The Northrop Frye Lectures in Literary Theory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 207.
- ⁷⁵ Bal, *Reading "Rembrandt"*, p. 207.
- ⁷⁶ J. Cheryl Exum, *Is This Naomi?*, in *The Practice of Cultural Analysis: Exposing Interdisciplinary Interpretation*, ed. by Mieke Bal (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 140-149.
- ⁷⁷ Steinberg, *Sexuality of Christ*, p. 386.
- ⁷⁸ For an example of Steinberg's compelling powers of ekphrasis, this extract from Leo Steinberg, 'Michelangelo's Florentine Pieta: The Missing Leg Twenty Years After', *The Art Bulletin*, 71, no. 3 (1989). 'The *Bruges Madonna* of 1503-05 shows the divine boy held between Mary's knees, i.e., in manifest filiation. His pose is curious, at once eager and hanging back, one tiny hand squeezing the mother's thumb, while the other clutches her thigh. Yet his legs, like his lowered glance, point the direction to go — though again not without equivocation, since the dipping toes seem irresolute. One would think of a foot testing waters were it not for the load of foreseen sorrow that weighs from the apex down. Mother and Son know that the pending step is not lightly taken. So the contrapposto of the sleek naked Child, whose head and legs overrule hesitant hands, arms, and shoulders, compounds the whim of an infant, clinging and wanting out, with the will of one whose native childishness sways with foreknowledge. The contrapposto is both psychologized and theologized. Hence the conflicted stance, the smooth glide of the lower body drawn by its leading limb to produce a posture that both relucts and performs; a posture ambivalent even at this unstable footing, where a heel lingers in a hammock fold of the mother's skirt, as if the wavering between safety and venture could be epitomized in one foot. What we see is protectedness at the steep of a precipice, and a compositional system aimed at a ripple of infant toes about to touch down. As the boy issues, his condition *ex Vergine* becomes his visible attribute. Call it 'whenceness'; it defines his incarnate nature as Mary's issue. The overt derivation from these maternal loins and the imminent footfall are as doctrinal as the Creed.'



- ⁷⁹ Richard Rambuss, *Closet Devotions* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 3.
- ⁸⁰ Rambuss, *Closet Devotions*, p. 3.
- ⁸¹ Rambuss, *Closet Devotions*, pp. 4-5.
- ⁸² Rambuss, *Closet Devotions*, p. 100.
- ⁸³ Griselda Pollock, 'A Feminist Difference', *Art in America*, October (2000). Letter by way of a response to a review of Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London: Routledge, 1999), by Ken Johnson, in *Art in America*, March (2000).
- ⁸⁴ Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, p. 112.
- ⁸⁵ Jonathan Jones, 'The Genius of Rome', *Guardian*, March 2nd (2002). Available: <http://education.guardian.co.uk/print/0,,4365987-108246,00.html>. Accessed 1 July 2007.
- ⁸⁶ Schama, 'When Stone Came to Life'.
- ⁸⁷ Polkinhorn cites Robert T. Petersson, *The Art of Ecstasy: Teresa, Bernini, and Crashaw* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), p. 64.
- ⁸⁸ Polkinhorn cites Rudolf Wittkower, *Gian Lorenzo Bernini: The Sculptor of the Roman Baroque* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 25.
- ⁸⁹ Polkinhorn, 'Remembering to Forget'.
- ⁹⁰ Polkinhorn, 'Remembering to Forget'. Polkinhorn cites Petersson, *The Art of Ecstasy*, p. 45.
- ⁹¹ Polkinhorn, 'Remembering to Forget'.
- ⁹² Petersson, *The Art of Ecstasy*, p. 72.
- ⁹³ This subject will be returned to at length in subsequent chapters.
- ⁹⁴ Schama, 'When Stone Came to Life'.
- ⁹⁵ Schama, 'When Stone Came to Life'.
- ⁹⁶ The characterisation 'myth and metaphor' is borrowed from Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993). (recently republished under the title *Mary Magdalen: Truth and Myth* (London: Pimlico,

2005). In the history of art, representations before Savoldo had ranged from Donatello's emaciated Magdalene in Fig. 28, to the fleshy and provocative interpretation by Titian in Fig. 26; and in modern day popular culture, the saint's representations have ranged from the film by Martin Scorsese, 'The Last Temptation of Christ' (1988) to the saint's recent notoriety in her mystical secret identity as the Holy Grail in Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* (London: Corgi, 2004). These examples, of course, refer to representations referring to the Magdalene of the Gospels, not taking into account the whole culture of the redeemed fallen woman, or virgin prostitute with flaming red hair, which form part of the saint's wider visual and cultural legacy. For one of the most comprehensive serious accounts of the history of the Magdalene's representation in culture, see Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*.

⁹⁷ Bal, *Reading "Rembrandt"*, p. 179.

⁹⁸ Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 204.

⁹⁹ See also the full discussion of the mirror in Mieke Bal, 'Self-Reflection as a Mode of Reading', in *Reading "Rembrandt": Beyond the Word-Image Opposition*, The Northrop Frye Lectures in Literary Theory, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 247-286.

¹⁰⁰ Bal, *Travelling Concepts*, p. 22.

¹⁰¹ The Magdalene was initially portrayed as a redeemed prostitute due to confusion with other biblical women, and this image was imposed upon her by a Catholicism determined to portray the Magdalene as the lesser counterpoint to the perfection of the Virgin – see Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Picador, 1976) – and to neutralise some of the traces of influence she retained from her important role in Gnosticism.

¹⁰² These comments are cited by Mary Pardo, 'The Subject of Savoldo's Magdalene', *Art Bulletin*, LXXI, no. 1, March (1989), 70-71. These comments all refer to the Berlin version of the painting, which lacks the ointment jar present in the London versions which might have increased the secularity of these interpretations.

¹⁰³ Pardo, 'The Subject of Savoldo's Magdalene', 90.

¹⁰⁴ Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio*, p. 260.

¹⁰⁵ *The Nag Hammadi Library*, ed. by James M. Robinson, (San Francisco: Harper, 1990). Pardo dismisses, on formal grounds, the more erotically charged interpretations of the painting. Specifically, she argues that a combination of portrait and religious narrative leads to a confusion of genres.

¹⁰⁶ The Magdalene has recently been portrayed as Jesus' wife and the mother of his child in popular non-fiction and fiction, from M Baigent, Leigh, R, Lincoln, H., *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* (London: Arrow, 1996), to Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*.

¹⁰⁷ Carmen L. Robertson, 'Gender Relations and the Noli Me Tangere Scene in Renaissance Italy' (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 1993), p. 2. 'Noli me Tangere' refers to the scene in the Gospel of John, verse 20, where the Magdalene meets Jesus in the garden, in the early morning when he has risen from the dead. It is traditionally translated as 'Do not touch me' although a more literal translation would be 'Do not hold on to me'. (See for example the Bible translation by the *New Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, ed. by Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA NRSV, Anglicized Edition edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).)

¹⁰⁸ Examples include Fra Bartolommeo, 'Lamentation,' (Florence: Palazzo Pitti); at Jesus' feet by Moretto da Brescia (c. 1498-1554), 'Pietà,' 1520s, National Gallery of Art, Kress Collection, Washington D.C.; at the foot of the cross embracing Jesus'

feet by Bramantino, 'Crucifixion,' c. 1520, Brera, Milan; and alone at the foot of the cross Giulio Clovio, (1498-1578) 'Crucifixion with Mary Magdalene,' Uffizi, Florence. Also see Moshe Arkin, "'One of the Marys...': An Interdisciplinary Analysis of Michelangelo's Florentine Pietà', *Art Bulletin*, LXXIX, no. 3, Sept (1997), pp. 493-517, for a fascinating reinterpretation of the sculpture by Michelangelo Buonarroti, 'Pietà,' c. 1550, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence, along these lines, which identifies the Magdalene in a privileged position in the composition, basing its argument on the influence of Vittoria Colonna.

¹⁰⁹ See Rona Goffen, *Giovanni Bellini* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

¹¹⁰ The Magdalene's ecstasy is contextualised largely in terms of her time in the desert recounted in the *Golden Legend* – Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend, or Lives of the Saints*, ed. by F.S. Ellis (1275). By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, while the fifteenth century themes were still prevalent, (for example, Francesco Trevisani (1656-1746), 'The Magdalene at the Foot of the Cross,' Palazzo Pitti, Florence), the focus had shifted in line with Counter-Reformation emphasis on the Sacraments, in particular penitence, hence the popularity of this strain of Magdalene imagery. The intercessory power of the saints was also strongly promoted, which necessitated, in particular, the dramatisation of their suffering and torture undergone for their faith, as Emile Mâle summarises; 'After the Council of Trent, the martyrs struggle beneath our gaze; we must see their blood flowing, and bear witness to their painful agony'. Mâle, *L'art Religieux*, p. 147. This new emphasis on making visible every aspect of the saints' experience, combined with the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola, published in 1548, and the popularity of the writings of the mystics such as St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, led to mystical ecstasy being more and more in demand as a subject for works of art.

¹¹¹ The Croce collection work (Fig. 27) was recently attributed to Caravaggio by M. Marini. See *Michelangelo Da Caravaggio. La Maddalena Di Paliano 1606-2006. Catalogo Della Mostra (Paliano, 30 Giugno-2 Luglio 2006)*, ed. by M. Marini, (Rome: De Luca Editori d'Arte, 2006). For a recent book summarising the current status of this painting and its attribution, see John Gash, *Caravaggio*, Chaucer Library of Art (London: Chaucer Press, 2004), p. 103. It was recently exhibited as a Caravaggio at *Il Meraviglioso et la Gloria*. Palazzo Bonaguro, Bassano del Grappa, 2007; *Visioni ed estasi. Capolavori dell'arte europea tra Seicento e Settecento*. Braccio di Carlo Magno, Piazza San Pietro, Vaticano, 2004.

¹¹² Cited by Sommer, 'Iconography of Action', 31.

¹¹³ Andrew Greeley, 'Erotic Desire in Art: A Catholic Perspective' (1995). Available: http://www.agreeley.com/articles/eros_art.html. Accessed 20/06/2004.

¹¹⁴ Laura Mulvey, 'Afterthoughts on Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), p. 29.

¹¹⁵ Mulvey, 'Afterthoughts'.

¹¹⁶ Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York/London: Routledge, 1996), chapter 1, 'The Bodily Ego'.

¹¹⁷ Silverman, *Threshold.*, chapter 3, 'Political Ecstasy'.

¹¹⁸ Habert is referring to another copy of the painting kept at the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Bordeaux. Jean Habert, *Bordeaux, Musée Des Beaux-Arts, Inventaire Des Collections Publiques Françaises* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1991), pp. 53-54. *My own translation. In the original French*: 'Le retentissement de cette création révolutionnaire fut considérable, puisqu'il s'agit de l'oeuvre de Caravage la plus copiée, surtout dans le milieu moins inhibé des artistes du Nord travaillant en Italie, et dont le peintre flamand Louis Finson (Bruges av. 1580 – Amsterdam 1617)

se voulait l'interprète privilégié ; mais le tableau n'eut en fait aucun postérité véritable : les copistes, et après eux les adaptateurs, n'osèrent plus présenter la sainte seule et sans attributs, et se conformèrent aux recommandations formulées en 1582 par l'évêque de Bologne, le cardinal Gabriele Paleotti (1522-1597), principal avocat de la Contre-Réforme en matière iconographique, qui préconisait la représentation des saints en extase accompagnés... de leurs attributs et soutenus par des anges pour bien marquer la qualité inaccessible au commun de leur expérience mystique.'

¹¹⁹ de Voragine, 'Golden Legend'.

¹²⁰ The term 'ecstasy' comes from a Greek word, meaning outside of the body; to remove oneself from a place, or the alienation of the self. For clear definitions of the different meanings of 'ecstasy' see N. G. Holm, 'Ecstasy Research in the 20th Century - an Introduction', in *Religious Ecstasy: Based on Papers Read at the Symposium on Religious Ecstasy Held at Åbo, Finland, on the 26th-28th August 1981*, (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1982), pp. 7-26.

¹²¹ The theme of the Magdalene rejecting or turning away from a mirror is very common in the iconography of the saint. See for example Fig. 31: Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, 'The Conversion of the Magdalene', c. 1597-8, The Detroit Institute of Arts and Artemisia Gentileschi, 'Penitent Magdalene', 1617-20, Palazzo Pitti, Florence. The Magdalene's female companion in the Detroit painting is Martha, traditionally cast as the Magdalene's 'sister' thanks to confusion between Mary Magdalene and the Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus.

¹²² Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio*, p. 259. In the myth according to Ovid, Narcissus wastes away staring at his reflection. In the Caravaggio painting, Fig. 32, the body of Narcissus is broken up and fragmented by the contrasts of light and shade, suggesting the fragmentation of his identity in the mirror's mortal trap.

¹²³ Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio*, p. 260, first part quoting Silverman, *Threshold*, p. 33.

¹²⁴ Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio*, p. 259.

¹²⁵ Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio*, p. 260.

¹²⁶ Pardo, 'The Subject of Savoldo's Magdalene', 90.

¹²⁷ Cited in *Feminine Sexuality*, ed. by Mitchell and Rose, p. 147.

¹²⁸ A famous seventeenth century example of a mirror being at the heart of a play of gazes between painter, depicted subject, and viewers both within and outside of the painted surface occurs in Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez, (1599-1660) 'The Family of Philip IV', or 'The Maids of Honour' (Las Meninas), c. 1656, Prado Museum, Madrid.

¹²⁹ This phrase is taken from the Marquis de Sade's description of Bernini's *St. Teresa* - see note 140.

¹³⁰ Looking more deeply into the network, Savoldo's remarkable and innovative symbolic use of drapery throughout his oeuvre, as well as his metaphorical exploration of the mirror in other works (such as *Gaston de Foix*, in the National Gallery, London) may have been an actual influence on the young Caravaggio during his training in Lombardy.

¹³¹ Gospel of John 20:14, *New Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, ed. by NRSV.

¹³² Gospel of John 20:15, *New Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, ed. by NRSV.

¹³³ Gospel of John 20:16-17, *New Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, ed. by NRSV.

¹³⁴ Gospel of John 20:29, *New Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, ed. by NRSV.

¹³⁵ Gospel of Mary, *Nag Hammadi*, ed. by Robinson, p. 525.

¹³⁶ Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass* (London: Puffin Classics, 1984).

¹³⁷ Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*.

¹³⁸ Vuarnet, *Extases Féminines*, p. 135. 'Sainte Thérèse, parlant d'elle-même, se donnant en spectacle dans le livre intitulé *Ma vie*, le Bernin la donnant en

- spectacle, ou bien moi parlant d'eux deux, nous ne parlons pourtant pas de la même chose. La Thérèse réelle fut le suppôt d'une vérité plurielle (quelque part entre la Sainte, la Femme et l'Infâme), une vérité dont les répétitions, pour louables qu'elles soient, n'en sont pas moins nécessairement bouffonnes ou parodiques.'
- ¹³⁹ Vuarnet, *Extases Féminines*, p. 191.
- ¹⁴⁰ Donatien Alphonse François Sade, Marquis de, *Voyage D'Italie*. Quoted in Vuarnet, *Extases Féminines*, p. 122. 'C'est un chef-d'œuvre du Bernin. Ce morceau est sublime par l'air de vérité qui le caractérise, mais il faut seulement se pénétrer en le voyant que c'est une sainte, car à l'air extatique de Thérèse, au feu dont ses traits sont embrasés, il serait aisé de se méprendre.'
- ¹⁴¹ Donatien Alphonse François Sade, Marquis de, *"Justine", "Philosophy in the Bedroom" And Other Writings* (New York: Grove Press / Atlantic Monthly Press, 2000).
- ¹⁴² David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 313.
- ¹⁴³ Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, p. 1.
- ¹⁴⁴ Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, p. xix.
- ¹⁴⁵ Griselda Pollock, 'Feminist Interventions in the Histories of Art: An Introduction', in *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art*, (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 1-17. Reprinted as Griselda Pollock, 'Feminist Interventions in the Histories of Art: An Introduction', in *Art History and Its Methods: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Eric Fernie, (London: Phaidon, 1995), pp. 300-313.
- ¹⁴⁶ Linda Nochlin, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' *ARTnews*, January (1971). Cited by Pollock, 'Feminist Interventions', pp. 300-301.
- ¹⁴⁷ Pollock, 'Feminist Interventions', p. 300.
- ¹⁴⁸ Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London/New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 13. Referring to Sir Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form (A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1972).
- ¹⁴⁹ *The Literary Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, ed. by H. W. Beechy, (London: George Bell and Sons, 1890), II, p. 54. Cited by Edgar Wind, 'The Maenad under the Cross: Comments on an Observation by Reynolds', *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, 1 (July 1937).
- ¹⁵⁰ Aby Warburg, 'The Emergence of the Antique as a Stylistic Ideal in Early Renaissance Painting', trans. by David Britt, in *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, ed. by Kurt W. Forster, (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institutes Publications Programs, 1999).
- ¹⁵¹ Georges Didi-Huberman, 'Dialectik Des Monstrums: Aby Warburg and the Symptom Paradigm', *Art History*, 24, no. 5 (November 2001), pp. 624-625.
- ¹⁵² Sigrid Schade points out that Warburg continued to repeatedly modify the name he gave to this phenomenon, which varied from 'pathos formula' to 'primitive words of passionate gesture language' or 'disconnected dynaograms'. Sigrid Schade, 'Charcot and the Spectacle of the Hysterical Body: The 'Pathos Formula' as an Aesthetic Staging of Psychiatric Discourse - a Blind Spot in the

- Reception of Warburg', *Art History*, 18, no. 4 (1995), p. 501. Source: Ernst Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* (London: Warburg Institute, 1970), pp. 243, 251.
- ¹⁵³ Georges Didi-Huberman, 'Artistic Survival: Panofsky vs. Warburg and the exorcism of impure time', *Common Knowledge*, 9, no. 2 (2003), p. 273.
- ¹⁵⁴ 'The Warburgian rupture specifically consists of having envisaged of time itself as a montage of heterogeneous elements: this is the anthropological lesson of the "survival formations", which correspond so well, in a metapsychological context, to "symptom formations".'
- ¹⁵⁵ Johnnie Gratton, 'Georges Didi-Huberman's Iconology of the Ninfa Moderna', unpublished conference paper, *Icônes, Iconographie, Iconoclasmes: Conférence Annuelle de l'ADEFI* (Association des Etudes Françaises et Francophones d'Irlande), Dublin & Maynooth, 2002.
- ¹⁵⁶ In Greek myth, Leucippus's daughters Hilaeira and Phoebe, known as the Leucippides, were abducted by Castor and Pollux.
- ¹⁵⁷ Avigdor W. G. Posèq, 'The Composite 'Pathosformel' of Caravaggio's St. Mary Magdalene in Ecstasy', *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, 44(1991), 121.
- ¹⁵⁸ Posèq, 'The Composite 'Pathosformel'', 126.
- ¹⁵⁹ M. Marini, *Io Michelangelo Da Caravaggio* (Rome: 1974).
- ¹⁶⁰ In fact, it is possible to trace the clasped hands back to antique models: see Kristina Herrmann Fiore, 'Caravaggio's 'Taking of Christ' and Durer's Woodcut of 1509', *The Burlington Magazine*, 137, no. 1102 (1995). I discuss the clasped hands motif in detail from p. 118 onwards.
- ¹⁶¹ Giorgio Agamben, 'Aby Warburg and the Nameless Science', trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen, in *Potentialities*, ed. by Daniel Heller-Roazen, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 90.
- ¹⁶² Abigail S. Rischin, 'Beside the Reclining Statue: Ekphrasis, Narrative, and Desire in Middlemarch', *PMLA*, 111, no. 5 (1996), 1126.
- ¹⁶³ Rischin, 'Beside the Reclining Statue', 1126.
- ¹⁶⁴ Gash, *Caravaggio*, p. 16.
- ¹⁶⁵ Gash, *Caravaggio*, p. 103. The expression 'penitential pin-up' was used by Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, p. 262.
- ¹⁶⁶ Posèq, 'The Composite 'Pathosformel'', 123.
- ¹⁶⁷ Mieke Bal made these spoken comments as part of a question and answer session at the conference 'Frames and Other Travelling Concepts: A Symposium on Cultural Analysis, Theory and History', 18-19th September 2003, University of Leeds.
- ¹⁶⁸ A striking emphasis on the shoulder is also to be found in various other works by the artist including 'Boy Bitten by a Lizard', 1594, National Gallery, London; and 'Boy with a Basket of Fruit', c. 1593, Galleria Borghese, Rome.
- ¹⁶⁹ Cited by Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography*, p. 303.
- ¹⁷⁰ Margaret Iversen, 'Retrieving Warburg's Tradition', *Art History*, 16, no. December (1993). Reprinted as Margaret Iversen, 'Retrieving Warburg's Tradition', in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Donald Preziosi, Oxford History of Art, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 215-216.
- ¹⁷¹ Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, trans. by Sophie Hawkes (New York: Zone Books, 2004), p. 244.

¹⁷² Agamben, 'Aby Warburg and the Nameless Science', p. 100.

Notes to Chapter Two

- ¹ Bal, *Travelling Concepts*, p. 135.
- ² Bal, *Travelling Concepts*, p. 137.
- ³ Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio*, pp. 7, 15, 25.
- ⁴ Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio*, p. 7.
- ⁵ Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio*, p. 8.
- ⁶ M. Cousins and A. Hussain, *Michel Foucault* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 82. See in particular Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. by A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 2002).
- ⁷ Mieke Bal, *Louise Bourgeois' Spider: The Architecture of Art-Writing* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 31-32.
- ⁸ Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio*, p. 9. Sometimes called the mechanism of belatedness, *Nachträglichkeit* is Freud's theory that early traumas sometimes only gain meaning retrospectively when the person encounters a new trauma, related in some way, that 'awakens' the dormant or repressed memory in the shape of a symptom. See Sigmund Freud, *Studies in Hysteria* (London: Penguin, 2004). The concept is also used by Derrida in his construction of the theory of *différance*. See Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. by D. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).
- ⁹ Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio*, p. 3.
- ¹⁰ See for example M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. by C. Emerson and M. Holqvist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).
- ¹¹ Posèq, 'The Composite 'Pathosformel''.
- ¹² Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ninfa Moderna: Essai Sur Le Drapé Tombé* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 2002). likens Warburg's *Nachleben* to the symptom model provided by Freud's *Nachträglichkeit*, a concept also used by Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio*, p. 9.
- ¹³ Aphrodite is the goddess' Greek name, Venus her Roman name.
- ¹⁴ See Nanette Solomon, 'The Venus Pudica: Uncovering Art History's 'Hidden Agendas' and Pernicious Pedigrees', in *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, ed. by Griselda Pollock, (London/New York: Routledge, 1996).
- ¹⁵ Solomon, 'Venus Pudica' (p. 74). An extended version of Solomon's article was published as Nanette Solomon, 'Making a World of Difference: Gender, Asymmetry and the Greek Nude', in *Naked Truths: Women, Sexuality and Gender in Classical Art and Archaeology*, ed. by Ann Olga Koloski-Ostrow and Claire L. Lyons, (London/New York: Routledge, 2000).
- ¹⁶ First part of citation from Solomon, 'Venus Pudica', (p. 83). Second part of citation from Solomon, 'Making a World of Difference', (p. 204). There were more ancient precedents for a similar hand gesture being used as a fertility symbol – see Andrew Stewart, *Art, Desire and the Body in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- ¹⁷ Stewart, *Art, Desire and the Body in Ancient Greece*, p. 100.

- ¹⁸ Wiltrud Nehmer-Pfau, *Studien Zur Ikonographie Und Gesellschaftlichen Funktion Hellenistischer Aphrodite-Statuen* (Bonn: Dr. Rudolph Habelt GMBH, 1982). See also Solomon, 'Venus Pudica', (p. 85). note 23.
- ¹⁹ Stewart, *Art, Desire and the Body in Ancient Greece*, p. 101.
- ²⁰ Andrew Stewart, 'Review of the Aphrodite of Knidos and Her Successors: A Historical Review of the Female Nude in Greek Art by Christine Michelle Havelock', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 7, no. 1 (1996), 104.
- ²¹ Sue Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 154.
- ²² Stewart, *Art, Desire and the Body in Ancient Greece*, p. 104.
- ²³ Kenneth D. S. Lapatin, 'Review of the Aphrodite of Knidos and Her Successors: A Historical Review of the Female Nude in Greek Art by Christine Michelle Havelock', *The Art Bulletin*, 79, no. 1 (1997), 156.
- ²⁴ Stewart, *Art, Desire and the Body in Ancient Greece*, p. 100.
- ²⁵ Solomon, 'Venus Pudica', (p. 76).
- ²⁶ Solomon, 'Venus Pudica', (p. 77).
- ²⁷ Solomon, 'Venus Pudica', (p. 77).
- ²⁸ Stewart, *Art, Desire and the Body in Ancient Greece*, p. 103.
- ²⁹ Stewart, *Art, Desire and the Body in Ancient Greece*, pp. 102-103.
- ³⁰ Stewart, *Art, Desire and the Body in Ancient Greece*, p. 104.
- ³¹ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ouvrir Vénus* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1999), p. 11. '...reclose, aussi impénétrable qu'elle est belle.'
- ³² Nead, *The Female Nude*.
- ³³ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York/London: Routledge/Kegan Paul, 1966).
- ³⁴ Laura Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity* (Bloomington. Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 63.
- ³⁵ St. John Chrysostom, (c347-407), Doctor of the Church and Bishop of Constantinople, cited in Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p. 58. Available online : <<http://www.geocities.com/paulntobin/womenfathers.html>>, Accessed 17/12/06.
- ³⁶ Notably St. Clement of Alexandria (c150-c215), Tertullian (c160-c225), Origen (c185-254), St. Jerome (c342-420), St. Augustine (354-450), St. John Chrysostom (c347-407).
- ³⁷ Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity*, p. 59.
- ³⁸ Didi-Huberman, *Ouvrir Vénus*.
- ³⁹ Referring to Kenneth Clark, *The Nude; a Study of Ideal Art* (London: John Murray, 1956).
- ⁴⁰ A summary: 'When something unpleasant has happened to the subject, or when he himself has done something which has a significance for his neurosis, he interpolates an interval during which nothing further must happen... In endeavouring to prevent associations and connections of thought, the ego is obeying one of the oldest and most fundamental commands of obsessional neurosis, the taboo on touching. The avoidance of touching is of paramount importance in this illness because it is the immediate aim of the aggressive as well as the loving object cathexes.' Carrie Lee Rothgeb, 'An Autobiographical Study, Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety, Lay Analysis and Other Works (1925-1926)', *Abstracts of the Standard Edition of the Psychological Works of*

- Sigmund Freud, 20 (1971). Available: http://nyfreudian.org/abstracts_24_20.html. Accessed 8 June 2007.
- ⁴¹ Didi-Huberman, *Ouvrir Vénus*, p. 28.
- ⁴² ‘...les images organiques seraient donc... à double face’. Didi-Huberman, *Ouvrir Vénus*, p. 40.
- ⁴³ ‘Ouvrir un corps, n’est-ce pas le défigurer, briser toute son harmonie?’ Didi-Huberman, *Ouvrir Vénus*, p. 40.
- ⁴⁴ ‘...impossible de l’isoler, c’est à dire d’ignorer l’inquiétude mortelle que porte en soi toute nudité de la chair,’ Didi-Huberman, *Ouvrir Vénus*, p. 63.
- ⁴⁵ Nead, *The Female Nude*, p. 6.
- ⁴⁶ Nead, *The Female Nude*, p. 6.
- ⁴⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by L. Roudiez (New York/Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1982).
- ⁴⁸ Kelly Oliver, ‘The Crisis of Meaning’, in *The Kristeva Critical Reader*, ed. by John Lechte and Mary Zournazi, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), pp. 36-54 (p. 47).
- ⁴⁹ Nead, *The Female Nude*, p. 7.
- ⁵⁰ Solomon, ‘Venus Pudica’, p. 77.
- ⁵¹ Solomon, ‘Venus Pudica’, p. 81.
- ⁵² Didi-Huberman, *Ouvrir Vénus*. ‘Son espèce de solitude pensive l’éloigne de nous comme de sa propre existence sexuelle.’
- ⁵³ José Morel Cinq-Mars, *Quand La Pudeur Prend Corps* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002), p. 172. ‘...transforme la relation entre le regardant et le regardé : de relation d’objet elle devient relation d’intersubjectivité.’
- ⁵⁴ Various, ‘La Pudeur, Une Histoire De La Nudité’, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 2000. ‘Tant qu’elle n’ouvre pas les yeux, je peux la regarder tout mon soûl. Tant qu’endormie, non consciente, elle ne sait pas qu’elle est regardée, je n’éprouve pas de sentiment de gêne. Mais si par malheur elle ouvre les yeux, son regard croisant le mien me fera comprendre en un clin d’oeil que, dans son monde, je suis un voyeur. Alors, j’aurai honte.’
- ⁵⁵ Various, ‘La Pudeur, Une Histoire De La Nudité’. ‘Le sentiment de honte ne peut naître que dans un psychisme capable de se représenter le monde mental d’un autre. En deçà de cette aptitude, les émotions s’expriment sans gêne, spontanément, sans pudeur ni impudeur.’
- ⁵⁶ Mary D. Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art* (Princeton/Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 246.
- ⁵⁷ Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, p. 145.
- ⁵⁸ I will develop my reading alongside Pollock’s full argument in the chapter which follows.
- ⁵⁹ Didi-Huberman, *Ouvrir Vénus*, p. 18. ‘Pour finir de séparer le nu de sa propre nudité, on s’est plu – car c’était facile – à l’habiller d’un troisième vêtement: ...un vêtement d’idées... Façon d’affirmer, une fois encore, que ce nu ne devait pas être vu devant, frontalement offert, mais plutôt de *biais*, par détour. Il s’agissait, en somme, d’interposer un écran : il s’agissait que le *symbolisme du nu* pût s’imposer devant la *phénoménologie de sa nudité*.’
- ⁶⁰ Didi-Huberman, *Ouvrir Vénus*, p. 22. ‘On a fait du nu lui-même l’habillage, le vêtement, le tenant-lieu e quelque chose d’autre : vêtement... de la beauté idéale, vêtement des récits mythologiques...’
- ⁶¹ Georges Bataille, *L’érotisme* (Paris: Editions Minuit, 1952).

- ⁶² Didi-Huberman, *Ouvrir Vénus*, p. 118. 'Mais tout nous commande de suivre jusqu'au bout la logique de ce processus d'ouverture que l'image de la nudité appelle sur elle-même, fomente contre elle-même.'
- ⁶³ Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, *Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 45.
- ⁶⁴ Cinq-Mars, *Quand La Pudeur Prend Corps*, p. 172. '...l'enfant ne pourra plus s'exhiber en toute innocence : la sexualisation du regard aura transformé l'acte de (se) montrer en un « donner à voir », de sorte que ce qui sera vu sera toujours autre chose que ce qui sera montré : il y aura désormais, et pour toujours, un au-delà et un manque à ce que l'œil verra.'
- ⁶⁵ Cinq-Mars, *Quand La Pudeur Prend Corps*, p. 172. 'Parce qu'elle convoque le désir, la pudeur en effet transforme la relation entre le regardant et le regardé : de relation d'objet elle devient relation d'intersubjectivité.'
- ⁶⁶ 'Bernini a construit, 'au-dessus' du corps de Ludovica, un corps en représentation, composé d'un 'corps réel' et d'un 'corps imaginaire' en proie à la passion spirituelle.' Careri, 'Envois d'amour' (pp. 71, 234-235).
- ⁶⁷ Bal, *Louise Bourgeois' Spider*, p. 94.
- ⁶⁸ Bal, *Louise Bourgeois' Spider*, p. 100.
- ⁶⁹ Quoted in Philippe Comar, *Les Images Du Corps* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), p. 116. 'L'imagination de ses adorateurs la leur peignait d'après leurs caractères et leurs passions, et chacun... ne plaçait sous ce voile mystérieux que l'idole de son cœur.'
- ⁷⁰ '...aveuglés par ce qu'ils ne voient pas.' Comar, *Les Images Du Corps*.
- ⁷¹ Jacques Lacan, Séminaire IV. Cited by Cinq-Mars, *Quand La Pudeur Prend Corps*, p. 173. 'C'est par l'existence des habits que se matérialise l'objet. Même quand l'objet réel est là, il faut qu'on puisse penser qu'il ne peut pas y être, et qu'il soit toujours possible qu'on pense qu'il est là précisément ou il n'est pas.'
- ⁷² Schor's comments were in the context of an acerbic criticism of a photograph by Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #103*. Mira Schor, 'Backlash and Appropriation.' in *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970's, History and Impact*, ed. by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc, 1994), pp. 248-263 (p. 255).
- ⁷³ I will return to these issues in chapter four.
- ⁷⁴ Bal, *Louise Bourgeois' Spider*, pp. 96-97.
- ⁷⁵ Bal, *Louise Bourgeois' Spider*, p. 97.
- ⁷⁶ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 46.
- ⁷⁷ St. Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle* (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group Inc, 1990).
- ⁷⁸ 'La monade est l'autonomie de l'intérieur, un intérieur sans extérieur. Mais elle a pour corrélat l'indépendance de la façade, un extérieur sans intérieur.' Gilles Deleuze, *Le Pli: Leibniz Et Le Baroque* (Paris: Minuit, 1988), p. 39.
- ⁷⁹ Deleuze, *Le Pli*, p. 39.
- ⁸⁰ 'médiatisé, distendu, élargi', Deleuze, *Le Pli*, p. 165.
- ⁸¹ Bal, *Louise Bourgeois' Spider*, p. 94.
- ⁸² Gen Doy, *Drapery: Classicism and Barbarism in Visual Culture* (London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002). Quotations taken from M. Perniola, 'Between Clothing and Nudity', in *Zone 4: Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, ed. by M. Feher and R. Nadaff, (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 2.
- ⁸³ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 64.
- ⁸⁴ The sculpture's title 'Douche Douche' literally means 'Shower Shower'. I am unaware of a specific reference here but it perhaps refers to the superfluity of the copper 'shower' soaking the already 'wet' aspect of the draperies.

- ⁸⁵ Audrey Norcia, 'Parisart: Artiste Didier Trenet', *parisART*, (2007). Available: <http://www.paris-art.com/artiste/artiste/4087/artiste-didier-trenet.html>. Accessed 21/08/07. 'Ici, pour le Louvre, j'aime plutôt l'idée de révélation.... c'est une autre façon d'attirer l'attention sur cette oeuvre. Il y a donc ce désir d'attirer l'œil... Et tout cela tourne autour de l'idée du regard, du toucher... et de toucher le regard...'
- ⁸⁶ Norcia, 'Parisart: Artiste Didier Trenet'. 'Je vois bien aussi les ondulations des tubes comme une chevelure...évoquant celle de Marie-Madeleine par exemple. Mais ici cachée...'
- ⁸⁷ Medieval sumptuary law prevented prostitutes from wearing a veil, as a sign of their immodesty. See John Pope-Hennessy, *An Introduction to Italian Sculpture, vol. III: Italian Renaissance Sculpture* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996), p. 171. See also Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, p. 242.
- ⁸⁸ Norcia, 'Parisart: Artiste Didier Trenet'.
- ⁸⁹ Griselda Pollock, 'The Grace of Time: Narrativity, Sexuality and a Visual Encounter in the Virtual Feminist Museum', *Art History*, 26, no. 2 (2003), p. 203.
- ⁹⁰ Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio*, p. 27.
- ⁹¹ See http://www.artnet.com/magazine_pre2000/features/kuspit/kuspit4-29-98.asp
- ⁹² See <http://www.millenniumpark.org/sbcplaza.htm>.
- ⁹³ Laura Mulvey, 'A Phantasmagoria of the Female Body: The World of Cindy Sherman', *New Left Review*, 188, no. July-August (1991), p. 148.
- ⁹⁴ Mulvey, 'A Phantasmagoria', p. 148.
- ⁹⁵ Mulvey, 'A Phantasmagoria', p. 150.
- ⁹⁶ Mulvey, 'A Phantasmagoria', p. 150.
- ⁹⁷ Mulvey, 'A Phantasmagoria', p. 150.
- ⁹⁸ Mulvey, 'A Phantasmagoria', pp. 146-147.
- ⁹⁹ Rosalind Krauss, *Bachelors* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), p. 110. Cited by Michelle Meagher, 'Would the Real Cindy Sherman Please Stand Up? Encounters between Cindy Sherman and Feminist Art Theory', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 13, no. 1 (2002), 22.
- ¹⁰⁰ Mulvey, 'A Phantasmagoria', 147.
- ¹⁰¹ Mulvey, 'A Phantasmagoria', 148.
- ¹⁰² Meagher, 'Would the Real Cindy Sherman...' 25-26.
- ¹⁰³ Meagher, 'Would the Real Cindy Sherman...' 19.
- ¹⁰⁴ Michelle Hirschhorn, 'Orlan: Artist in the Post-Human Age of Mechanical Reincarnation: Body as Ready (to Be Re-) Made', in *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, ed. by Griselda Pollock, (London/New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 116.
- ¹⁰⁵ Parveen Adams, *The Emptiness of the Image: Psychoanalysis and Sexual Differences* (London/New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 146.
- ¹⁰⁶ Adams, *Emptiness of the Image*, pp. 146-147.
- ¹⁰⁷ Adams, *Emptiness of the Image*, p. 154.
- ¹⁰⁸ Adams, *Emptiness of the Image*, p. 158.
- ¹⁰⁹ Barbara Creed, 'Alien and the Monstrous Feminine', in *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. by Annette Kuhn, (London: Verso, 1990), p. 128. Cited by Hirschhorn, 'Orlan', p. 128.
- ¹¹⁰ Hirschhorn, 'Orlan', p. 128.
- ¹¹¹ Adams, *Emptiness of the Image*, p. 159.
- ¹¹² Adams, *Emptiness of the Image*, p. 159.

- ¹¹³ Theresa M. Senft, 'Shockingly Tech-Splicit: The Performance Politics of Orlan and Other Cyborgs', in *Reload: Rethinking Women and Cyberculture*, ed. by Austin Booth and Mary Flanagan (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), pp. 539-546.
- ¹¹⁴ Senft asks what has been achieved a decade later, with such discourses becoming increasingly problematic and 'shock' tactics such as those in effect in Orlan's surgery work approaching banality. Although Orlan herself disclaims any intent of shock value, Senft discounts this as unviable, seeing a shock response as the inevitable result of the nature of her work and the choice of medium as the manipulation of the form of shock which would inscribe Orlan in the cultural and political 'avant-garde' formations she desired.
- ¹¹⁵ Senft, 'Shockingly Tech-Splicit', (p. 541).
- ¹¹⁶ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 6.
- ¹¹⁷ Meagher, 'Would the Real Cindy Sherman...' p. 21.

Notes to Chapter Three

- ¹ The swathe of fabric around the Magdalene's bare shoulder was increased in size in a later addition to the painting. A version which remains closer to the original in this respect is the copy in Mexico City (Fig. 83).
- ² Mary D. Garrard, *Artemisia around 1622: The Shaping and Reshaping of an Artistic Identity* (Berkeley/LA/London: University of California Press, 2001), p. 73.
- ³ See for example Guido Reni, *The Penitent Magdalene*, 1635, Oil on canvas, 91 x 74 cm, Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, and *St Mary Magdalene*, 1633, Oil on canvas, 234 x 151 cm, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome. The representation of the penitent Magdalene, along with that of St. Peter, was very common around this time as it had been encouraged by the Catholic Church to emphasise the sacrament of penitence, disregarded by the Protestant reformers.
- ⁴ The attribution of this painting is discussed in Keith Christiansen and Judith W. Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi* (New Haven/London/New York: Yale University Press/Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001), pp. 365-366. Christiansen describes the Mexico version as an inferior copy by another artist while Ward Bissell and Garrard attribute both paintings to Artemisia Gentileschi (R. Ward Bissell, *Artemisia Gentileschi and the Authority of Art* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999) and in particular Garrard, *Artemisia around 1622*, pp. 27-35.)
- ⁵ Garrard, *Artemisia around 1622*, p. 39.
- ⁶ Didi-Huberman, *Ouvrir Vénus*.
- ⁷ Christiansen and Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*, p. 365.
- ⁸ Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, p. 145.
- ⁹ Robert Rosenblum, *Paintings in the Musée D'orsay* (Stewart, Tabori, & Chang, 1989). Rosenblum is here referring to Alexandre Cabanel's 'Birth of Venus', 1863, Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Jules Joseph Lefebvre's subsequent 'Mary Magdalene in the cave', 1876, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, has an extremely similar posture and female figure including the ambiguity of the depiction of the eyes, shaded behind her arm.

- ¹⁰ Ward Bissell, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, p. 52.
- ¹¹ Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, p. 145. This analysis refers to Artemisia Gentileschi's *Cleopatra*: Fig. 126: Artemisia Gentileschi, 'Cleopatra', 1610-12, Amedeo Morandotti, Milan
- ¹² Elizabeth B. Davis, "'Woman, Why Weepest Thou?' Re-Visioning the Golden Age Magdalen", *Hispania*, 76, no. 1 (1993), 40.
- ¹³ Julia Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater', in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 209.
- ¹⁴ In her analysis of Spanish sixteenth and seventeenth century texts on Mary Magdalene, Elizabeth Davis also points out that the motif of the Magdalene's hair, used to wash Jesus's feet in the scene in Luke, also takes part in the paradoxical meanings surrounding the Magdalene's body. In the poetry of Lope de Vega in particular, the hair functions elsewhere as a tool of sexual assault to 'ensnare' men, and here to 'entrap' the feet of Christ: 'This misogynist valuation ... is complicated by a textual insistence that when she "captures" Christ in this way, she herself becomes "entangled," and thereby – paradoxically – freed forever. ... The important point here is not, I believe, that Mary assumes a subordinate role to Christ (after all, the twelve apostles did the same thing), but that since both Mary and Jesus are equally "chained" in this new arrangement, the simple subject/object relationship breaks down. This suggests that, like her tears, Magdalen's hair is a complex poetic object.' Davis, "'Woman, Why Weepest Thou?' Re-Visioning the Golden Age Magdalen', 40.
- ¹⁵ Artemisia Gentileschi had her own reasons for not reproducing this positioning of the hands, which I will return to in the next chapter.
- ¹⁶ Posèq, 'The Composite 'Pathosformel'', 126-127.
- ¹⁷ Posèq, 'The Composite 'Pathosformel'', 130.
- ¹⁸ This hand position was also very commonly used specifically for the Magdalene in Northern European art of the 15th and 16th centuries, such as examples by Jan van Eyck, 1430, 'The Last Judgment', Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Rogier van der Weyden, 1435, 'Deposition', Museo del Prado, Madrid; Dieric Bouts the Elder, 1460, 'Deploration', Louvre, Paris; Colijn de Coter, 'The Throne of Mercy', 16th century, Louvre, Paris; Mathias Grunewald, c. 1515, 'Isenheim Altarpiece', Musée d'Unterlinden, Colmar.
- ¹⁹ Sergio Benedetti, 'Caravaggio's 'Taking of Christ', a Masterpiece Rediscovered', *The Burlington Magazine*, 135, no. 1088 (1993), 740.
- ²⁰ Bruce Johnston and Nigel Reynolds, 'New Twist in the Tale of Two Caravaggios', *The Daily Telegraph*, 17 February 2004. A source for this interpretation of the hand gesture is not given.
- ²¹ Giovan Pietro Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, trans. by Alice Sedgwick Wohl, Helmut Wohl and Giovanna Perini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 182.
- ²² Jeff Nisbet, 'Beyond the Lost Caravaggio', *Atlantis Rising*, May/June, no. 57 (2006). Available:
http://www.mythomorph.com/mm/content/2006/0702beyond_the_lost_caravaggio.php. Accessed 04 September 2007.
- ²³ Probably the most iconic proponent of this theory is Hugh J. Schonfield, *The Passover Plot* (New York: Disinformation Company, 2005).

- ²⁴ The painting may represent the moment just before or just after the kiss. See section on Cleopatra in chapter four. The role of the figure of Caravaggio in this painting could be assimilated to Michael Fried's concept of the 'surrogate beholder' (Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 158.)
- ²⁵ Fiore, 'Caravaggio's 'Taking of Christ' and Durer's Woodcut of 1509', 25.
- ²⁶ Posèq also mentions the statue of Demosthenes in a footnote, but appears to discount it as a source for Caravaggio, instead focusing on the theory of Jorio's contemporary gestural language being used to create a 'composite pathosformel'. Posèq, 'The Composite 'Pathosformel'', 127.
- ²⁷ Paul Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates: The Image of the Intellectual in Antiquity*, trans. by Alan Shapiro (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), p. 85.
- ²⁸ Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates*, p. 85.
- ²⁹ Cited by Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates*, p. 86.
- ³⁰ Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates*, p. 86.
- ³¹ Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates*, p. 88.
- ³² *Iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière, 1875-1880*, Paris: Bureaux du Progrès Medical/Delahaye and Lecrosnier, and *Nouvelle Iconographie de la Salpêtrière, 1888-1918*. Some sections available online: <<http://charcot.bum.jussieu.fr/>>. Accessed May 2006.
- ³³ Sigmund Freud, 'Hysterical Phantasies and Their Relation to Bisexuality', trans. Nicola Luckhurst, in *Studies in Hysteria* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 315.
- ³⁴ See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*.
- ³⁵ In the classic oedipal interpretation, hysteria is generally considered to be a type of conversion disorder, in the sense that the patient will deal with psychic trauma by converting it into a bodily symptom, which could range from paralysis of a limb or part of the face, to inability to speak, depending on the nature of the initial trauma. For instance, paralysis of the legs could signify being emotionally paralysed. For more on the cultural history and nature of hysteria, see for example Elisabeth Bronfen, *The Knotted Subject: Hysteria and Its Discontents* (Princeton University Press, 1998), and Juliet Mitchell, *Mad Men and Medusas: Reclaiming Hysteria* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).
- ³⁶ Martha Noel Edmunds, *Fits and Starts: A Genealogy of Hysteria in Modern France* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991). See also Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985).
- ³⁷ Elisabeth Bronfen, 'The Knotted Subject: Hysteria, Irma and Cindy Sherman', in *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, ed. by Griselda Pollock, (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 42-57.
- ³⁸ Mitchell, *Mad Men and Medusas*, p. 16.
- ³⁹ Schade, 'Charcot and the Spectacle of the Hysterical Body', 501.
- ⁴⁰ Although many of the patients photographed were female, and hysteria was traditionally seen as a female condition, Juliet Mitchell is at pains to point out that Charcot in fact did much to emphasise that hysteria was also experienced by men. Mitchell, *Mad Men and Medusas*, p. 12.
- ⁴¹ Barasch, 'Tossed-Back Head', (p. 20).
- ⁴² Giovanni Careri, *Bernini: Flights of Love, the Art of Devotion*, trans. by Linda Lappin (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

- ⁴³ Charcot, *Leçons de Mardi*, 1888, quoted in Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière* (London/Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2003), p. 32.
- ⁴⁴ Quoted in Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria*, p. 32.
- ⁴⁵ Quoted in Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria*, p. 32.
- ⁴⁶ Mady Schutzman, *The Real Thing: Performance, Hysteria, and Advertising* (Hanover & London: Wesleyan University Press, 1999), p. 66.
- ⁴⁷ For the concept of the photograph's mortal power to simultaneously immortalise and destroy the subject it depicts, see Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (London: Vintage Classics, 1993). See also Christian Metz, 'Photography and Fetish', in *The Critical Image: Essays on Contemporary Photography*, ed. by C. Squiers, (Seattle: Bay Press, 1990) and Silverman, *Threshold*.
- ⁴⁸ Silverman, *Threshold*, pp. 148-149.
- ⁴⁹ Carol Armstrong, 'Probing Pictures: Carol Armstrong on Georges Didi-Huberman - Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière - Book Review', *Artforum International Magazine*, September (2003).
- ⁵⁰ For a survey of the literature on Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills*, see Rosalind E. Krauss, 'Cindy Sherman's Gravity: A Critical Fable', *Artforum International*, September (1993) and Meagher, 'Would the Real Cindy Sherman...'.
⁵¹ Garrard, *Artemisia around 1622*, pp. 47-48.
- ⁵² Although the temporal simultaneity functions in this one painting, it could be extended to encompass Gentileschi's earlier *Magdalene*, 1617-20, in the Palazzo Pitti in Florence. Where the Florence *Magdalene*, dressed in fine gold fabric with delicately curled hair, seems on the very point of standing up and parting from her luxurious lifestyle, the Seville/Mexico *Magdalene* has moved a step beyond: she is more mature, and has already grieved for her past life.
- ⁵³ As in the case of Gentileschi's *Magdalenes*, in Still #84 (below) Sherman has provided what could be said to form a companion image to Still #10, a wider shot of almost the same scene giving a sense of a 'before' as the woman reaches down towards the fallen shopping, her expression more animated (perhaps exasperated) before the eggs become a readable sign within the narrative. Such pairings of images reinforce the function of temporality and the sense of 'film stills', although Sherman conspicuously separates such pairings in her sequencing of the photographs for the recent MoMA publication. Cindy Sherman, *The Complete Untitled Film Stills* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2003).



Cindy Sherman, 'Untitled Film Still #84'

- ⁵⁴ Quoted by Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria*, p. 192.
- ⁵⁵ Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria*, p. 122.
- ⁵⁶ Dyan Elliott, 'Dominae or Dominatae? Female Mysticism and the Trauma of Textuality', in *Women, Marriage and Family in Medieval Christendom*, (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University Press, 1998), p. 73.
- ⁵⁷ Elliott, 'Dominae or Dominatae', p. 74.
- ⁵⁸ Life of Elisabeth of Spaalbeek, from *Medieval Writings on Female Spirituality*, ed. by Elizabeth Spearing, (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 110.
- ⁵⁹ *Female Spirituality*, ed. by Spearing, p. 111.
- ⁶⁰ *Female Spirituality*, ed. by Spearing, p. XXVII.
- ⁶¹ *Female Spirituality*, ed. by Spearing, p. 109.
- ⁶² Freud, 'Hysterical Phantasies', p. 315.
- ⁶³ Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria*, p. 162.
- ⁶⁴ Laurie Finke, 'Mystical Bodies and the Dialogics of Vision', in *Maps of Flesh and Light: New Perspectives on the Religious Experience of Medieval Women Mystics*, ed. by Ulrike Wiethaus (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1992), p. 29
- ⁶⁵ Cathérine Clément and Hélène Cixous, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. by B. Wing (University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
- ⁶⁶ Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria*.
- ⁶⁷ Armstrong, 'Probing Pictures'.
- ⁶⁸ Ward Bissell, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, p. 52.
- ⁶⁹ Garrard, *Artemisia around 1622*, p. 39.
- ⁷⁰ Posèq, 'The Composite 'Pathosformel'', 121.
- ⁷¹ Bal, *Louise Bourgeois' Spider*, p. 95.
- ⁷² *Female Spirituality*, ed. by Spearing, p. XXVII.
- ⁷³ Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria*, p. 122.
- ⁷⁴ Bronfen, *Knotted Subject (1998)*, p. 183.
- ⁷⁵ *Female Spirituality*, ed. by Spearing, p. XXVIII.
- ⁷⁶ Sherman, *The Complete Untitled Film Stills*, p. 9.
- ⁷⁷ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. xii.
- ⁷⁸ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 10.
- ⁷⁹ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. vii.
- ⁸⁰ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, pp. 209-210.

- ⁸¹ Konrad Polthier, 'Imaging Maths - inside the Klein Bottle', *Plus Magazine: University of Cambridge Millennium Mathematics Project*, 26, September (2003). Referring to F. Klein, *Über Riemann's Theorie Der Algebraischen Functionen Und Ihrer Integrale* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1882).
- ⁸² Polthier, 'Imaging Maths'.
- ⁸³ Cliff Stoll, 'Acme Klein Bottles', (Available: http://www.kleinbottle.com/whats_a_klein_bottle.htm).
- ⁸⁴ Hans Jonas, 'Spinoza and the Theory of Organism', in *Philosophy of the Body: Rejections of Cartesian Dualism*, ed. by Stuart Spicker, (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970), (p. 55). Also cited by Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 11.
- ⁸⁵ *Female Spirituality*, ed. by Spearing, p. 121.
- ⁸⁶ The image depicts Hildegard dictating her visions, emanating like flames from above, to the monk, Volmar. The illustrations are by an unknown artist, whom it is assumed was closely directed by Hildegard. For a book including an account of the research surrounding these images see Madeline H. Caviness, *Visualizing Women in the Middle Ages: Sight, Spectacle, and Scopic Economy*, Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).
- ⁸⁷ For a study of concepts of medieval corporeality placed in juxtaposition with modern feminist body art, see Caviness, *Visualizing Women*. Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff discusses the concept of the body for medieval female mystics in *Body and Soul*, p. 205-224.
- ⁸⁸ Exodus 3
- ⁸⁹ Acts 2
- ⁹⁰ Genesis 19:24
- ⁹¹ Matthew 3:11, *New Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, ed. by NRSV.
- ⁹² Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 200.
- ⁹³ Deuteronomy 4:12 and 4:15, *New Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, ed. by NRSV.
- ⁹⁴ Exodus 3.
- ⁹⁵ NRSV.
- ⁹⁶ Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, pp. 203-204.
- ⁹⁷ Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, p. 204.
- ⁹⁸ NRSV.
- ⁹⁹ Quoted by Lavin, *Bernini*, p. 207.
- ¹⁰⁰ *The Life of Saint Teresa of Avila*, ed. by J. M. Cohen, (Penguin: London: 1957), p. 175. Quoted by Marina Warner, *Joan of Arc: The Image of Female Heroism* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), p. 124.
- ¹⁰¹ Quoted in Suzanne Warma, 'Ecstasy and Vision: Two Concepts Connected with Bernini's Teresa', *The Art Bulletin*, 66, no. 3, September (1984), p. 511.
- ¹⁰² 'The Book of Margery Kempe', in *Female Spirituality*, ed. by Spearing, pp. 229, 234.
- ¹⁰³ *Female Spirituality*, ed. by Spearing, p. 235.
- ¹⁰⁴ Careri, *Flights of Love*.
- ¹⁰⁵ Posèq, 'The Composite 'Pathosformel''.
- ¹⁰⁶ Elliott, 'Dominae or Dominatae', (p. 77).
- ¹⁰⁷ Lavin, *Bernini*, p. 111.
- ¹⁰⁸ Doy, *Drapery*., quotations taken from Perniola, 'Between Clothing and Nudity', pp. 253-254).
- ¹⁰⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, (d. circa 395 C.E.), *On the Birth of Christ*: "From this we learn also the mystery of the Virgin: The light of divinity which through birth shone from

- her into human life did not consume the burning bush, even as the flower of her virginity was not withered by giving birth." See Maria Gwyn McDowell, 'Christian Interpretations of Exodus 3: The Burning Bush' (2004).
- ¹¹⁰ Charles Minott confirms the existence of the iconography in Western Christianity as well as positing another source roughly contemporary with Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom: 'The burning bush in which God appeared to Moses has been associated in representational art with the Virgin Mary since at least as early as the Visitation group on the north porch of Chartres Cathedral, where it serves as her pedestal. Literary sources for the association are even older in origin. Louis Reau, in *Iconographie de l'art chrétien* ...has traced the theme to the writings of St. John Chrysostom.' Charles A. Minott, 'A Note on Nicolas Froment's 'Burning-Bush Triptych'', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 25, no. 3/4 (1962), 323.
- ¹¹¹ Nead, *The Female Nude*, p. 6.
- ¹¹² Bal, *Louise Bourgeois' Spider*, p. 94.
- ¹¹³ *Female Spirituality*, ed. by Spearing, p. 15.
- ¹¹⁴ *Female Spirituality*, ed. by Spearing, p. 17.
- ¹¹⁵ Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 69. Cited by Gen Doy, *Picturing the Self: Changing Views of the Subject in Visual Culture* (London/New York: I. B. Tauris, 2005), p. 66.
- ¹¹⁶ David Hillman, 'The Inside Story', in *Historicism, Psychoanalysis and Early Modern Culture*, ed. by C. Mazzio and D. Trevor, (London/New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 300. Cited by Doy, *Picturing the Self*, p. 41. See also David Aers, 'A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists: Or, Reflections on Literary Critics Writing the 'History of the Subject'', in *Culture and History, 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing*, ed. by David Aers, (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 177-202.
- ¹¹⁷ Warner, *Joan of Arc*, p. 125.
- ¹¹⁸ In the story of Joan of Arc, in fact, her heart and entrails refused to burn and were thrown into the river Seine, as if her body really did resist the literal attempt to dispose of it.

Notes to Chapter Four

- ¹ Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, p. 246.
- ² Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, pp. 143-145.
- ³ The dating espoused by Garrard for both the *Cleopatra* and the *Magdalene* (1621-22, Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*.) would make the *Cleopatra*, the *Magdalene* (Fig. 78) and the *Lucretia* (Fig. 128) roughly contemporaneous. However, Christiansen and Mann disagree and place the *Magdalene* several years later, and the *Cleopatra* ten years earlier. For the *Cleopatra* Christiansen supports an attribution to Orazio, Artemisia's father, while Mann supports an attribution to Artemisia, to the extent that the painting is listed twice in their double *catalogue raisonné* (Christiansen and Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*. Although I am not in a position to judge the date or attribution on technical grounds, one argument used by Christensen, 'the style of the *Cleopatra* has very little in common with that of other works by Artemisia datable to the 1620s', could perhaps be challenged on the grounds I present here. Christiansen and Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*, p. 97.
- ⁴ Garrard, *Artemisia around 1622*, pp. 47-48.
- ⁵ Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, p. 163.

- ⁶ Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, pp. 162-163.. See Bal, *Reading "Rembrandt"*, pp. 74-75. for an account of a *Lucretia* by Rembrandt which also contains a dual temporality.
- ⁷ Mulvey, 'A Phantasmagoria', 142.
- ⁸ Mulvey, 'A Phantasmagoria', 143.
- ⁹ Krauss, 'Cindy Sherman's Gravity'.
- ¹⁰ Bronfen, 'Knotted Subject'(1996), p. 53.
- ¹¹ Krauss, 'Cindy Sherman's Gravity'.
- ¹² Krauss, 'Cindy Sherman's Gravity'.
- ¹³ See the extended theorisation of the gaze as process (opposed to the glance) by Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (London: Macmillan, 1983).
- ¹⁴ Bal, *Reading "Rembrandt"*, p. 220.
- ¹⁵ Bal, *Reading "Rembrandt"*, p. 223.
- ¹⁶ For a seminal theorisation of the representation of the death of female figures in art and literature see Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 1992).
- ¹⁷ Mulvey, 'A Phantasmagoria', 142.
- ¹⁸ Julia Kristeva, 'Etre Mère Aujourd'hui', *Colloque Gypsy V: Rêves de femmes* (Jardin des plantes, Grand Amphithéâtre du Muséum national d'histoire naturelle, 57 rue Cuvier, 75005 Paris, 2005).
- ¹⁹ Judith Mann, 'Caravaggio and Artemisia: Testing the Limits of Caravaggism', *Studies in Iconography*, 18 (1997), p. 166.
- ²⁰ Mann attributes the maternal identification of the posture to Pete Steefel (see note 19, Mann, 'Caravaggio and Artemisia').
- ²¹ Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, p. 339.. Similar ideas about the role of the Magdalene and the bloodline of Jesus had previously been upheld in several books including notably Baigent, *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*.
- ²² Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, p. 344.
- ²³ In this legend, the Magdalene interceded to enable the ruler of Provence's wife to conceive miraculously, and then for her son to survive for two years after his mother's death from miraculous milk from his dead mother's breasts. See Katherine Ludwig Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 296-297.
- ²⁴ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, pp. 294-303.
- ²⁵ Penny Jolly, 'Rogier Van Der Weyden's "Pregnant" Magdalene: On the Rhetoric of Dress in the Descent from the Cross', *Studies in Iconography*, 28 (2007).
- ²⁶ While the Virgin with the baby Jesus is one of the most common subjects in all of Western art, she is rarely depicted pregnant. Scenes of the 'Visitation' form a notable exception (depictions of the scene from Luke 39-45 when she goes to meet Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist) and there are certain rare examples: the fresco by Piero della Francesca (c. 1455, Cappella di Santa Maria di Momentana, Monterchi) is one of the most well-known. For the most complete study of images of the pregnant Virgin see Gregor Martin Lechner, *Maria Gravida* (Munich: Schnell and Steiner, 1981).
- ²⁷ Jolly, 'Van Der Weyden's "Pregnant" Magdalene'.
- ²⁸ Jolly, 'Van Der Weyden's "Pregnant" Magdalene'.
- ²⁹ See in particular the speech by Diotima in Plato's *Symposium*, which includes a theorisation of metaphorical pregnancy, and the analysis by Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, 'Diotima and the Matrixial Transference: Psychoanalytical Encounter-Event as Pregnancy in Beauty', in *Across the Threshold: Explorations of Liminality*

- in Literature*, ed. by Hein Viljoen and Chris N. van der Merwe, (New York: Peter Lang, 2007). Luce Irigaray also wrote on the figure of Diotima in Luce Irigaray, 'Sorcerer Love: A Reading of Plato, Symposium, Diotima's Speech', in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 20-33.
- ³⁰ Jolly, 'Van Der Weyden's "Pregnant" Magdalene'.
- ³¹ It should be noted that the Gnostic texts are still not fully understood and in places are self-contradictory. In the Gospel of Thomas for instance, lines 22-24 suggest a form of ideal androgyny and equality of the sexes rather than a becoming male; "when you make male and female into a single one, so that the male shall not be male, and the female shall not be female: . . . then you will enter [the kingdom]." *Nag Hammadi*, ed. by Robinson. However the equation male=spirit and female=body can be traced through subsequent Gnostic-inspired cultures such as that of the Cathars, and it can be surmised that at least some of the meaning of line 114 was transmitted through culture.
- ³² Gospel of Mary, in *Nag Hammadi*, ed. by Robinson, p. 525.
- ³³ Rosemary Betterton, 'Maternal Figures: The Maternal Nude in the Work of Käthe Kollwitz and Paula Modersohn Becker', in *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, ed. by Griselda Pollock, (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 168.
- ³⁴ Julia Kristeva, 'Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini', in *Desire in Language*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p. 240. Quoted in Betterton, 'Maternal Figures', p. 172.
- ³⁵ Betterton, 'Maternal Figures'.
- ³⁶ Kristeva, 'Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini', p. 242.
- ³⁷ Cited in Amy Mullin, 'Pregnant Bodies, Pregnant Minds', *Feminist Theory*, 3, no. 1 (2002).
- ³⁸ Kelly Oliver, 'Kristeva and Feminism', (1998). Available: <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/feminism/Kristeva.html>. Accessed 25 September 2007.
- ³⁹ Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater', (p. 182).
- ⁴⁰ Jan van Eyck, 'The Arnolfini Portrait', (London, 1434). See Brigitte Buettner, 'Dressing and Undressing Bodies in Late Medieval Images', in *Proceedings of the Twenty-Eighth International Congress of the History of Art*, (Berlin: 1993), pp. 384-385. whose representations of female bodies from this period all have exaggerated rounded bellies (reference from Jolly, 'Van Der Weyden's "Pregnant" Magdalene'.)
- ⁴¹ See Edwin Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal: Medieval Marriage and the Enigma of Van Eyck's Double Portrait* (University of California Press, 1994), pp. 121-122. Hall's examples include Jan van Eyck, 'Small Triptych' (right wing, St. Catherine), Gemäldegalerie, Dresden; Rogier van der Weyden, 'Seven Sacraments' (right wing), 1445-50, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp; Brothers Limbourg, 'The Martyrdom of Saint Catherine of Alexandria', Belles Heures, 1406-9, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Cloisters Collection, New York
- ⁴² Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal*, p. 121.
- ⁴³ Margaret L. Koster, 'The Arnolfini Double Portrait: A Simple Solution', *Apollo*, September (2003).
- ⁴⁴ Imogen Tyler, 'Skin-Tight: Celebrity, Pregnancy and Subjectivity', in *Thinking through the Skin*, ed. by Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey, Transformations: Thinking through Feminism, (Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 69-83.
- ⁴⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. by T. Gora, A. Jardine and L. S. Roudiez, ed. by L. S. Roudiez (London: Blackwell, 1993), p. 238.

- ⁴⁶ Tyler, 'Skin-Tight', (p. 74).
- ⁴⁷ See in particular Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits Of "Sex"* (London: Routledge, 1993), G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Athlone Press, 1988), and S. Plant, *Zeros and Ones: Digital Women and the New Technoculture* (London: Fourth Estate, 1998).
- ⁴⁸ Tyler, 'Skin-Tight', p. 71.
- ⁴⁹ Didier Anzieu, *The Skin Ego: A Psychoanalytic Approach to the Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). For a more recent updated French edition see Didier Anzieu, *Le Moi-Peau* (Paris: Dunod, 1995).
- ⁵⁰ Tyler, 'Skin-Tight', p. 78.
- ⁵¹ For other uses of *Le Moi-peau*, see: *Thinking through the Skin*, ed. by Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey, *Transformations: Thinking through Feminism*, (London/New York: Routledge, 2001), and Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*.
- ⁵² Anzieu, *Le Moi-Peau*, p. 30.
- ⁵³ Didier Anzieu, *L'épiderme Nomade Et La Peau Psychique [the Wandering Epidermis and the Psychic Skin]* (Paris: Absygee, 1990), p. 58. Translation Naomi Segal.
- ⁵⁴ Naomi Segal, 'Consensuality: Didier Anzieu, Gender and the Sense of Touch' (University of London School of Advanced Study, 2007), p. 39.
- ⁵⁵ Tyler, 'Skin-Tight', p. 73.
- ⁵⁶ Tyler, 'Skin-Tight', p. 72.
- ⁵⁷ Segal, 'Consensuality'. See also Naomi Segal, 'The Other French Freud: Didier Anzieu - the Story of a Skin' (2006). Available: <http://hdl.handle.net/10065/62>. Accessed 16/03/2007.
- ⁵⁸ Anzieu, *Le Moi-Peau*, p. 85. Translation Naomi Segal.
- ⁵⁹ Anzieu, *Le Moi-Peau*, p. 85. My translation. In the original French: 'Avant la constitution du fantasme de peau commune, le psychisme du nouveau-né est dominé par un fantasme intra-utérin, qui nie la naissance et qui exprime le désir propre au narcissisme primaire d'un retour au sein maternel – fantasme d'inclusion réciproque, de fusion narcissique primaire dans laquelle il entraîne plus ou moins sa mère elle-même vidée par la naissance du fœtus qu'elle portait ; fantasme, ravivé plus tard par l'expérience amoureuse, selon lequel chacun des deux, en le tenant dans ses bras, envelopperait l'autre tout en étant enveloppé par lui. ...L'interface transforme le fonctionnement psychique en système de plus en plus ouvert, ce qui achemine la mère et l'enfant vers des fonctionnements de plus en plus séparés. Mais l'interface maintient les deux partenaires dans une dépendance symbiotique mutuelle. L'étape suivante requiert l'effacement de cette peau commune et la reconnaissance que chacun a sa propre peau et son propre Moi, ce qui ne s'effectue pas sans résistance ni sans douleur.'
- ⁶⁰ Tyler, 'Skin-Tight', p. 73.
- ⁶¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), p. 163.
- ⁶² Steven Connor, 'Integuments: The Scar, the Sheen, the Screen', *New Formations*, 39(1999), 47. Quoted in Tyler, 'Skin-Tight', p. 76.
- ⁶³ Connor, 'Integuments', 46. Quoted in Tyler, 'Skin-Tight', p. 76.
- ⁶⁴ Most famously since the series in *Life* magazine in 1965. See for example Lennart Nilssen, '18-Week Fetus', *Life*, 30 April (1965). Available: <http://www.life.com/Life/60th/classic/cv043065.html>. Accessed 9 April 2007.
- ⁶⁵ For a summary of the impact of new technologies on the abortion debate from a critical feminist point of view see Tyler, 'Skin-Tight', p. 79.
- ⁶⁶ Tyler, 'Skin-Tight', p. 81.

- ⁶⁷ For the text of the article see Laura Brown, 'One Sexy Mother: From Idolized Pop Princess to Cultural Lightning Rod, Britney Spears--Pregnant with Her Second Child--Reveals Body and Soul, and Tells Why Her Baby's a Rock Star.' *Harper's Bazaar*, August (2006). Available: http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-17630338_ITM. Accessed 9 April 2007.
- ⁶⁸ The Tokyo metro banned (for a time) the display of a poster of the magazine cover, claiming it would 'stimulate' young people. 'Tokyo 'Will Allow' Nude Spears Ad', *BBC News Online*, no. 24 August (2006). Available: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/5280910.stm>. Accessed 18 September 2007. While no censorship to the scale of that surrounding the Demi Moore photograph occurred in the western media, complaints which did arise varied. Some expressed absolute disgust in vulgar terms: one blog website read 'Do you have your bucket ready?... Brits is in the buff for the cover... Plus she's six months bloated with baby. Plus she's way out of her prime.' Shawn Lindseth, 'Britney Spears Drops Clothes', *Hecklerspray*, no. 29 June (2006). Available: <http://www.hecklerspray.com/britney-spears-drops-clothes/20063734.php>. Accessed 18 September 2007. Others criticise Britney's attitude and appearance as constructed in the photographs. One complaint letter to *Harper's Bazaar* magazine read, 'Demi Moore was earthy, natural, radiant, beautiful – she perfectly embodied everything that was beautiful about being with child. Britney Spears is a child. She is brimming over with... fresh, child-like energy... There is none of the stunning beauty of pregnancy – just a young girl trying desperately to get attention. Britney Spears is getting older and is trying to leave her "cute and bubble gum" image behind, trading it for a "sexy and edgy" image. Ok. I get it. The problem is, "cute and bubble gum" worked for her because it's what she looks like. She looks young and innocent and bubbly. (And yes, I know she's not that innocent, but like it or not she still looks it.) Mixing "cute and bubble gum" together with "sexy and edgy" makes the innocent on-looker feel as if they have become some kind of paedophile.' Beth T., 'Bazaar Magazine Makes a Bizarre Choice!' *PlanetFeedback.com*, no. 29 June (2006). Available: http://www.planetfeedback.com/index.php?level2=blog_viewpost&topic_id=288048. Accessed 18 September 2007.
- ⁶⁹ Pamela Allara, "'Mater" Of Fact: Alice Neel's Pregnant Nudes', *American Art*, 8, no. 2, Spring (1994), 16-17.
- ⁷⁰ Allara describes *Maria* as 'a latter-day *Olympia*', Allara, "'Mater" Of Fact', 16. Edouard Manet, 'Olympia', 1863, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.
- ⁷¹ Lise Clavel, 'Pregnant Maria', *Brain-Juice.com*, (2000-2). Available: http://www.brain-juice.com/cgi-bin/show_wok.cgi?p_id=119&w_id=339. Accessed 16 September 2007.
- ⁷² Clavel's comments are in the context, not of an academic article but of an internet resource intended for the general public. Therefore this interpretation has the potential to be more widely disseminated.
- ⁷³ Denise Bauer, 'Alice Neel's Female Nudes', *Woman's Art Journal*, 15, no. 2 (Autumn 1994).
- ⁷⁴ Allara, "'Mater" Of Fact', 12.
- ⁷⁵ Allara, "'Mater" Of Fact', 30.
- ⁷⁶ At the time of writing the sculpture is exhibited at Chatsworth House by Sotheby's (between September 8th and 4th November 2007.)
- ⁷⁷ Tom Teodrczuk, 'Shark, Sheep - Now Hirst Shocks with Virgin Mother', *Evening Standard (London)*, 25 May (2005). Available:

- http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4153/is_20060525/ai_n16438363. Accessed 9 April 2007.. See also Will Doig, 'Pregnant with Meaning', *New York Magazine*, no. 28 March (2005). Available: <http://nymag.com/nymetro/news/people/columns/intelligencer/11552/>. Accessed 9 April 2007.
- ⁷⁸ See 'Degas at the Races: Sculpture', (2007). Available: <http://www.nga.gov/education/degas-20.shtm>. Accessed 9 April 2007.
- ⁷⁹ Respectively, Kate Bluett, 'Playing with Death: Gunther Von Hagens's 'Body Worlds'', *Salvo*, 3 (2007). Available: <http://www.salvomag.com/new/articles/salvo3/3bluett.php>. Accessed 15 September 2007. and Dietmar Henning, 'Science, Art or Carnival Sideshow? The "Human Body Worlds" Exhibit in Cologne', *World Socialist Web Site*, (2000). Available: <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2000/mar2000/body-m23.shtml>. Accessed 15 September 2007. The organisers of Body Worlds state that all figures expressly donated their bodies for plastination while still living.
- ⁸⁰ Doig, 'Pregnant with Meaning'.
- ⁸¹ Carol A. Stabile, *Feminism and the Technological Fix* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 84.
- ⁸² Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, p. 154.
- ⁸³ Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, p. 154.
- ⁸⁴ See Pamela Askew, *Caravaggio's Death of the Virgin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).
- ⁸⁵ Howard Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1985), p. 262.
- ⁸⁶ Clare Robertson, 'Caravaggio. L'ultimo Tempo, 1606-1610, and Caravaggio: The Final Years Reviewed', *Renaissance Studies*, 19, no. 4 (2005), p. 558.
- ⁸⁷ Elizabeth Cropper, 'The Petrifying Art: Marino's Poetry and Caravaggio', *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, 26 (1991), pp. 199-201.
- ⁸⁸ David Packwood, 'A Brush with Death', *The Art Book*, 12, no. 3 (2005), pp. 10-11.
- ⁸⁹ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, p. 262.
- ⁹⁰ References to the iconography of the *Magdalene* are reinforced by the fact that one apparent prototype for the *Cleopatra* seems to have been a painting by Artemisia's father, Orazio, a *Penitent Magdalene*. This is an observation by Mina Gregori cited in Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, p. 106. This association also has the potential to introduce the role of the father into the network of mother and child so far developed.
- ⁹¹ Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, p. 108.
- ⁹² Udo Kultermann, 'Woman Asleep and the Artist', *Artibus et Historiae*, 11, no. 22 (1990), p. 140.
- ⁹³ Christiansen and Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*, pp. 371-373.
- ⁹⁴ 'The representation of a slumbering female raises questions about reading Artemisia's imagery in terms of forceful heroines with whom Artemisia could identify. While she has minimised some of the patently sexual references used by other artists, she has presented a vulnerable female, unaware of the viewer's gaze, who becomes the inadvertent object of male desire, evidence of Artemisia's willingness to respond to the requests of male patrons.' Christiansen and Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*, p. 373.
- ⁹⁵ The attribution of the *Spada Madonna* to Artemisia Gentileschi was rejected by Ward Bissell, *Artemisia Gentileschi*. Keith Christiansen and Judith Mann are however confident that it 'fit[s] well within Artemisia's early roman oeuvre'. Christiansen and Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*, p. 300. and Garrard likewise supports an attribution to Artemisia Gentileschi (Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, pp. 23-24.)

- ⁹⁶ Christiansen and Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*, p. 302.
- ⁹⁷ Lilian H. Zirpolo, 'Artemisia Gentileschi's *Spada Madonna* and the Trauma of Loss', in *Essays on Women Artists "The Most Excellent"*, ed. by Liana De Girolami Cheney, II (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), I, pp. 53-70.
- ⁹⁸ Zirpolo, 'Gentileschi's *Spada Madonna*', p. 61.
- ⁹⁹ Christiansen and Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*, pp. 92, 302.
- ¹⁰⁰ Christiansen and Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*, pp. 92, 302.
- ¹⁰¹ Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, p. 26.
- ¹⁰² Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, p. 151.
- ¹⁰³ Mary Garrard, 'Artemisia's Hand', in *The Artemisia Files: Artemisia Gentileschi for Feminists and Other Thinking People*, ed. by Mieke Bal, (London/Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 1-31, p. 5.
- ¹⁰⁴ Garrard, 'Artemisia's Hand', p. 5.
- ¹⁰⁵ Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, p. 151.
- ¹⁰⁶ Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, pp. 150-151.
- ¹⁰⁷ Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, p. 154.
- ¹⁰⁸ Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 202. Cited by Allara, "'Mater" Of Fact'.
- ¹⁰⁹ Christiansen and Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*, p. XVI. She had previously had at least two sons, who may have died in infancy, and went on to have several more children.
- ¹¹⁰ Rosemary Betterton, 'Prima Gravida: Reconfiguring the Maternal Body in Representation', *Motherhood: the Politics of Reproduction and Representation*, 9 June, (2000). Available: <http://www.women.it/cyberarchive/files/betterton.htm>. Accessed 27 September 2007.
- ¹¹¹ Luce Irigaray, 'Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre', in *The Daughter's Seduction*, ed. by Jane Gallop, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 116-117. Cited by Allara, "'Mater" Of Fact', p. 28.
- ¹¹² Kristeva, 'Etre Mère Aujourd'hui'. 'Par le dépassionnement progressif et/ou par son aptitude à la sublimation, la mère permet à l'enfant d'intérioriser et de représenter *non pas la mère* (« rien ne peut représenter l'objet maternel », écrit André Green), mais *l'absence de la mère* : si et seulement si elle laisse l'enfant libre de s'approprier la pensée maternelle en la recréant dans sa façon à lui de penser-représenter. La « suffisamment bonne mère » serait celle qui sait s'absenter pour céder la place *au plaisir, pour l'enfant, de la penser.*'
- ¹¹³ Kristeva, 'Etre Mère Aujourd'hui'. 'La mère de Colette réussit, en effet, même si elle ne va pas voir sa fille : elle n'est pas abandonnique, puisqu'elle lui a transmis sa propre passion pour la langage [sic]. (Sido a écrit à sa filles [sic] des lettres superbes : Colette finit par dire que l'écrivain de la famille, c'est sa mère et non pas « la grande Colette » !) La capacité de partager la passion par la seule saveur de la langue ne serait-elle pas une présence plus libre et plus protectrice que le corps à corps d'une mère gouvernante, auprès de sa fille qui ne cesserait d'en avoir besoin ?'

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