ON THE QUESTION OF THE HUMAN: A GENERAL ECONOMY OF CONTEMPORARY TASTES

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ABSTRACT

In the latter half of the 20th-century and into the 21st, William Burroughs, Samuel Delany, and bioartists such as Oron Catts, Orlan, and Stelarc have all attempted to create works which respond to the increasing biopoliticization of contemporary society. The biopolitics of today seek to regularize life and structure it according to the imperatives of economic thought, a process by which the human becomes the Foucauldian *homo œconomicus*. This restricted logic of biopolitics desperately tries to cover the explosive excess of the world today, what Bataille calls general economy. The artists under consideration in this work attempt to uncover this state of excess. While they are typically seen as exploring fantastic realms of the transgressive or, in the case of bioartists, attempting to emulate science fiction, in fact it is their realism which provokes. These artists reveal the heterological body, that which cannot be contained or described by the biopolitical regime. In so doing, they rewrite our standards of taste and point the way to understandings of the human that have been otherwise unavailable to us.

William Burroughs in *Naked Lunch* highlights the manipulability of affect in contemporary society through the reduction of the human to bare life. He uses the figure of flesh/meat as a way of depicting the heterogeneous body and to generate a counter-affect, or free-floating affect, which unlike typical affect, is not worked up into emotion. Samuel Delany, too, describes the heterogeneous or destabilized body in the heterotopia of his novel *Dhalgren*. While Burroughs is unable or unwilling to gesture towards the potentially radical implications of the heterogeneous body, Delany proposes a new model of community that rests upon the revelation of the heterogeneous body, a community which acts as one informed by an affirmative biopolitics. Bioart, a somewhat vexed genre of art, attempts to construct artworks that both utilize and critique new science and technology of the body. The life sciences are complicit in the rise of the biopolitical state

and further the view of the human as constrained by its material substrate. Fetishistic bioart problematically reproduces a fascination with the life sciences and advanced technology. However, the bioart which I call sacred has a demystifying effect and attempts to use the knowledge gained by the life sciences to expand our understanding of the human, going beyond the bounds of that very knowledge itself.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE

ABSTRACT iv

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS vi

CHAPTER

1. OVERTURNING THE BIOPOLITICAL STATE: FROM *HOMO ŒCONOMICUS* TO THE HETEROGENEOUS BODY 1

2. THE BODY AS MEAT: SACRIFICE'S AFFECT IN WILLIAM BURROUGHS'S *NAKED LUNCH* 51

3. THE LIVING THESIS: *DHALGREN*, THE HETEROGENEOUS BODY, AND THE FORMATION OF SACRED COMMUNITY 97

4. AT THE FRONTIERS OF ART AND SCIENCE: TABOO AND TRANSGRESSION IN BIOART 138

REFERENCES CITED 188

CHAPTER 1

OVERTURNING THE BIOPOLITICAL STATE: FROM *HOMO ŒCONOMICUS* TO THE HETEROGENEOUS BODY

In the following work, I will argue that the transgressive works of the artists under consideration – William Burroughs, Samuel Delany, and a number of artists practicing what is called bioart – enlarge an understanding of the human through a questioning and reworking of the standards of taste to effect what I will call a general economy of taste. General economy, as defined by French philosopher and writer Georges Bataille, a thinker who will be integral to my study, is the state of the world today, a state of explosive *excess*. A general economy of taste is an interrogation of the standards of taste which indicts not just these standards but all the social norms that determine what does and does not count as human.

Like Bataille's, the works of these artists are renowned for their transgressive content – the violence, the sex, the scatological references, the drug use, etc – and for their formal experimentation. While critics of these artists often characterize them as surrealists or fantasists, contrary to this accepted position, I believe that it is precisely these writers' realism that provokes. This fuller realism contradicts what might be called their audience's reality effect or even their superego. The disruption of this reality effect has important consequences for aesthetics, ethics, and politics. These works give the lie to what may be summarily described as contemporary biopolitics, connecting to both

Foucault's theorization of the regularization and disciplinarization of life and Agamben's postulation of "bare life." These artists' realistic works present a dystopian vision of the world today; however, while they do not offer a coherent program for a perfect society, they do retain something of a utopian hope: they reveal the heterological body, the body that is excluded from discourse, and suggest instead that the human is or can be, like Nietzsche's Übermensch, something more than this.

Generally-speaking, criticism on the artists under consideration can be classified in two ways. The first, which characterizes both popular commentary and a number of examples of academic scholarship, is to treat their works as cultural and legal touchstones in the history of the dialectic between obscenity and censorship. While certainly my own analysis will address this history, I aim to move beyond it, as such an approach is limited both by its dependence on the historical particulars of the standards of taste at the time of publication and release, thus seemingly losing any contemporary relevance, and by the simple reactive and negating power it ascribes to the works in question.

The second approach is also a historicizing one, but in this case, it takes place solely within the field of literary criticism and concerns the issue of periodization. Brian McHale in *Postmodernist Fiction*, Linda Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Patricia Waugh in *Metafiction*, and Timothy Murphy in *Wising Up the Marks* all discuss the novels of Burroughs or Delany or both in terms of situating the modern/postmodern divide. McHale, for example, sees Delany's works as constraining its postmodernist ontological themes via its modernist epistemological framework, while Burroughs's fiction is too ontologically disorienting to be effective satirically, though McHale concedes he may be a "superior postmodernist" (117). Timothy Murphy's monograph on

Burroughs is an illustrative example of a critic trying to escape the reified categories of modernism and postmodernism. He proposes instead a new term, “amodern,” to describe Burroughs’s work. If the term itself were not clue enough that rather than giving these terms the slip he has joined arms with them, his definition seems to rest on a blending of the two rather than a radical break. “Amodernism,” according to Murphy, “accepts the failure of modernist ends…without taking the additional step of homogenizing all remaining difference” (2). Amodernism does not come after postmodernism, but is something like postmodernism’s contemporaneous antagonist. Or maybe it would be more in keeping with the essence of Murphy’s argument to say that amodernism is the *protagonist*, as Murphy claims that amodernism retains something of the utopian. Though Murphy’s work on Burroughs is an important contribution to Burroughs scholarship, the addition of yet another periodizing term is questionable. What is to be gained by positing amodernism as something subtly different than postmodernism rather than another variant of it? Is the shifting of periodizing markers the value in itself?

I plan to move beyond both a historical account of obscenity and censorship and a reallocation of periodizing resources. I will instead show how via an interrogation of contemporary aesthetic judgment these artists challenge the current regime of taste, offering in its place what I will call a general economy of taste. It might seem counter-intuitive to address these works, known for their grotesque images, brutal themes, and propensity for arousing discomfort in their audiences, to the aesthetic judgment, typically associated with, to borrow from Kant’s language, the harmony of the faculties and the beautiful.

The aesthetic judgment in Kant's view is always a particular judgment which nevertheless can be universally agreed upon, a universal consensus which certainly seems to be missing in the reception of these works. There is another view of taste, however, that might make the union between aesthetic judgment and these works more feasible. In this view, aesthetic judgment is exercised in every domain of life and "good" taste becomes a mark of distinction. Following the social constructivism of Pierre Bourdieu, taste then is learned, a product of social class. In this sense, it functions as what Bataille calls a restricted economy, one based upon economic exchange and utility. Aesthetic judgment is exercised always and only to yield a profitable return. Both formally and thematically, the works of these artists undo or unravel the social constructions and overturn the restricted economy of taste and effectively provide a new economy of taste based on nonproductive expenditure.

Foucault argues that despite an apparent increase in freedom, we have simply entered a period in which one sort of relation between the governed and the governors has been replaced by another. Capitalism's and particularly, for Foucault, neo-liberal governments' success has been dependent upon the biopower of disciplinarization. The governors have taken on the task of regulating health, work, behavior, and even taste as the habitus is intricately tied to this disciplinarization. Contemporary neo-liberal styled governments treat the subject as *homo œconomicus*, only intelligible through his economic behavior. Among these subjects are those who hover right at the threshold of poverty, a "kind of infra- and supra-liminal floating population," who are guaranteed by the governments merely a "minimal existence" and can be called upon when needed for service and then returned to their threshold status. Foucault's theorization of those

guaranteed minimal existence corresponds to (and was most likely one of the sources for) Agamben's notion of "bare life." Modernity is characterized by the situation in which bare life or sacred life, life that is exposed to death and which traditionally had been at the margins of the political, comes to be incorporated into and even to dominate the political realm. For Agamben, biopower's creation of the biopolitical body is the site at which political technique merges with the processes of subjectivization. This discourse determines what is and what is not counted as human.

These artists expose the limitations of rational discourse, including that of biopolitics, in its ability to rewrite or cover over bodily materiality. Bataille's concerns were the forerunners of contemporary concerns about biopower, and as the biopolitical theorists attempt to do today, he desired to formulate an understanding of the body that lay outside the province of reigning scientific, objective views of it. He, too, it might be said, wanted to repair the Cartesian split. The immediacy of embodiment necessitates a great exertion of power in order to ignore it and to structure it, an exertion which has taken place over centuries, resulting in a deep-seated system of processes and forms for the body. Bataille and the other authors in question sought to explode this system, to terrorize it, and in the process unleash the energy of the system's tension.

Their works constitute what Bataille would call a heterological knowledge, one based upon "what is completely other" and, therefore, upon what is beyond the human as we know it, which is only constructed as bare life in modernity. Substituted in the place of the human is the sacred. Not the sacred in Agamben's sense, but as Bataille would have it. The Bataillean sacred retains the traditional ambivalence of the sacred in that it inspires both terror and awe in its presentation of unthinkable acts and unthinkable

thoughts. These works continue to challenge their audiences through their staging of transgressive acts with respect to the body and society but also through their pushing against the limits of form, offering readers in total a dizzying new vision of the human.

Before considering how transgressive works of art disrupt the reigning biopolitical order, it is important to assess the latter. From recent news about the disputes between the government and businesses about the monetary value of a life to the increasingly lonely lives we live through purportedly social media to the rise of the nanny state, can there be any doubt that our reality is one in which humanity has been reduced to "bare life"? Though I employ Agamben's term here, unlike him, I do not view current biopolitics as only a recent manifestation of an order that is originary with governance; rather, in keeping with Foucault, I believe that there has been a historical paradigm shift leading to the ascendency of the biopolitical order.

The Foucauldian theorization of biopolitics which is likely most familiar is that presented in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*. It is here that Foucault indicates the emergence of new methods of control based upon biopower – taking the form today of health regulation, public hygiene, genetic tracking, etc. – which replace disciplinary measures. But he also addresses the topic of biopolitics in several of his recently translated lectures, principally in *Society Must Be Defended* and *The Birth of Biopolitics*. It is in the former that he discusses the connection between sovereignty and biopolitics in relation to the historical shift. Sovereignty, of course, was predicated on the sovereign's right of life and death (240), a right that once was tilted towards the right to kill, to "take life or let live" (241). With the development of biopower, a new right arose, the "power to 'make' live and 'let' die."

Responses to Foucault's thesis regarding the rise of biopolitics vary, and the concordance or discordance consequently determines not only the historical scope of the inquiries, but also the hypothesized origins, the assessment of the deleterious effects of biopolitics, and the suggestions for resistance. As mentioned previously, Agamben, while indebted to Foucault, does not appear to similarly mark such a historical transition. Roberto Esposito makes much of the distinction between sovereignty and biopolitics as suggested here; however, for him, both sovereignty and biopolitics rest upon the immunitary paradigm. Immunization is a negative means of protecting life. Sovereign immunization in its current incarnation consists in the production of individuals who have been subtracted from "the *munus* that keeps them bound communally. Sovereignty is the not being [*il non essere*] in common of individuals, the political form of their desocialization" (61). Esposito, like Bataille, is much influenced by Mauss and his idea of the gift and uses it, as an *absent gift* held in abeyance, to ground his understanding of the social contract and its means of delimiting community life. *Immunitas* is in tension with (but also definitive of) *communitas*: "If *communitas* is that relation, which in binding its members to an obligation of reciprocal donation [the gift or donus], jeopardizes individual identity, *immunitas* is the condition of dispensation from such an obligation and therefore the defense against the expropriating features of *communitas*" (50). This roughly correspond to what Hannah Arendt describes in *The Human Condition* as the condition of private wealth for admittance into the public realm as the wealthy individual, who no longer needs to draw from the commonwealth, is also freed from the obligation of giving (64). (For Arendt, this thesis will lead to the body as the premier form of property because it may never be held in common.) Both immunity and

the insularity of private wealth lead to a desocialization. Esposito perceives a worsening of this effect. Although the immunitary paradigm has deep historical roots, only "modernity makes of individual self-preservation the presupposition of all other political categories, from sovereignty to liberty," and this paradigm reaches its awful fulfillment in Nazism (9). Esposito wants to preserve a distinction between biopolitics and biopower, which he feels Foucault "substantially superimposed" (44): "by the first is meant a politics in the name of life and by the second a life subjected to the command of politics" (15)[i]. This distinction will allow Esposito to recuperate the term biopolitics for more revolutionary purposes through his idea of "aporetic exposure," which I will discuss further on.

Hardt and Negri take a more explicitly materialist approach in their understanding of biopolitics. They emphasize the distinction Foucault makes between a disciplinary society, which corresponds with sovereignty, and a regulatory society, which corresponds with biopower. Hardt and Negri, following Deleuze, call this regulatory society a "society of control." In such a society, "power is exercised through machines that directly organize the brains (in communication systems, information networks, etc.) and bodies (through welfare systems, monitored activities, etc) toward a state of autonomous alienation from the sense of life and desire for creativity." (23) Though this statement threatens to fall back on some notion of a repressed, natural humanism, it usefully retains the concept of biopolitical power as both an external force and an interiorized process –

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[i] Esposito claims Foucault failed to "articulate the concept of politics," leading to the suppression of a distinction between biopolitics and biopower. As far as I have been able to ascertain, however, of Foucault's lectures, Esposito cites only *Society Must Be Defended*, not the *Birth of Biopolitics*, in which Foucault more explicitly formulates the modern biopolitical regime.

and hints at biopower's broader consequences for art. The relation of art to biopower is further elaborated through Hardt and Negri's contention that biopower is manifested through all our labor, whether material, intellectual, or affective, as this labor is subsumed to the wealth-accumulation of others and is not under individual control. Hardt and Negri believe that the means of resistance lies in the multitude's reappropriation of control.

Hardt and Negri's highlighting of compulsory labor and the degree to which "making a living" spreads, cancer-like, through all realms of human activity is presaged by Foucault's conceptualization of what he calls *homo œconomicus*. There appears to be a divergence between the subject of biopower as formulated in Foucault's *History of Sexuality* and *homo œconomicus* in *The Birth of Biopolitics.* As originally theorized, the subject of biopower is one, Hardt and Negri suggest, who has interiorized those measures that once served as discipline and punishment. It is a subject whose superego reigns supreme. In *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault shifts his focus from the Freudian subject to the Althusserian state. The state constructs its policy around an understanding of its subjects as *homo œconomicus.* Foucault thereby establishes the economic rationale undergirding the construction of the subject of biopower, an economic rationale which accounts for how market considerations form expectations for and of the subject of biopower.

The relationship between the subject of biopower and *homo œconomicus* is a puzzling one. One might first assume that the two are fairly close to synonymous. But there are suggestions in *The Birth of Biopolitics* that Foucault intended the latter to replace the former, although whether he is highlighting a historical transformation or

offering a revision of his previous work is left unclear. He suggests near the end of the series of lectures that contemporary society, influenced by neoliberalism, is not an exhaustively disciplinary society, nor is it a society in which normalizing mechanisms, as well as that of exclusion, are needed (the latter being typically associated with the Foucauldian formulation of contemporary society as based on biopower). Instead, it optimizes difference, accepts minority positions, and finally, works on principle of an "environmental type of intervention instead of the internal subjugation of individuals" (260). The ramifications of this extend to the penal system, the ostensible subject of Foucault's discussion, in which "the criminal, any person, is treated only as anyone whomsoever who invests in an action, expects a profit from it, and who accepts the risk of a loss" (253), to all of society, which becomes the consumer of conforming behavior.

Society thus hypothesized is not one in which behaviors are judged good or evil, but profitable and unprofitable. This is a morality beyond good and evil – but to the profit motive and the idea of human capital. In his discussion of neoliberalism, Foucault distinguishes between European neoliberalism and American neoliberalism. Liberalism was a founding principle of the American state, and Foucault believes that the particular addition to neoliberalism in the American strain is the idea of human capital. This began with an understanding of labor as capital, but then it expanded to cover all of the economic and the social. Every man becomes an entrepreneur of himself. It changes the idea of consumption to "an enterprise activity by which the individual…will produce something that will be his own satisfaction" (226). He suggests that the enterprise model is generalized to all of society, promulgated in the form of a "Vitalpolitik" in possession of warmth and morality, which contrasts with the "coldness" of competition (242). Given

the hegemonic influence of American politics and culture, this understanding of consumption has taken on global significance.

The subsumption of all human activity to the desire of and for profit is indicated by Bataille in his essay, “The Sovereign”: “Humanity isn’t the grand inspiration of poetry, exhausting me in vain: it is a type of greed engulfed in the December mud of a farm, in a country of frost, of jealousy, of harsh disease. Even a human being’s face tells me that it’s better to live with a little calculation and to subordinate every gesture to profit” (188). (Although this particular quote does not illustrate this, elsewhere in Bataille’s meditations on profit it becomes clear that the desire for profit is desire in the true Lacanian sense in that it is a mirroring of the Other’s desire and in that it always *exceeds* need.) What Foucault and Bataille both diagnose is the internalization of a socio-economic imperative, the translation from the social and political sphere to the individual’s psychology.

To return for a moment to the (non-)issue of the Foucauldian theorization of the subject of biopower vs. *homo œconomicus*, it seems that Foucault is simply suggesting a revision of what he had earlier believed to be the means of biopower – the ends (of authority and power) remain the same. Rather than internalizing notions of good and evil, normal and abnormal, the inclusive vs. the exclusive, neoliberal biopower works by chaining all of its subjects to the desire for profit. Why then retain the term biopower? The term is still applicable because of its connection to bare life and its associations with the minimal state of existence (for if every man is his own entrepreneurial project, then for the masses often life has not been raised above much more than a minimum of existence), immunity and insurance against risk, and so forth. Additionally, the term

warrants continued usage because the body, reduced to bare life, is often one of the remaining sites upon which the individual may enact his entrepreneurship. In fact, whatever Foucault's intentions might have been regarding the difference between the terms biopower and *homo œconomicus*, I contend that the two work most productively when considered in tandem with one another as they work to support the neoliberal state and its éminence grise, corporate interests.

Biopower as wielded by the neoliberal or biopolitical state rests upon the semiotics of a normative body, in which the body itself seems to have been thoroughly described and understood and all the channels for the flow of sensations have been regularized, a grand public works project of the body. It has been presented as a whole, multeity in unity, and its intact existence thus may be secured, the need for its security paving the way for a state of exception in which formerly illegitimate extensions of state power are now authorized and its weaknesses treated easily with the frenzied consumption and practices of the right medication, regular exercise, good hygiene, and a healthy diet. These latter are good practices, of course, when considered singly; however, it is the degree to which they preoccupy individuals, marginalizing all other aspects of human existence and reducing the subject's self-perception to a biological entity which one must care for *through the proper practices of consumption*, which results in docile, easily governable subjects. This homogenized, total body from which nothing can escape is quite different from the subject's body of disciplinary society - what the body was or did was relatively unimportant – which only constituted itself in the purview of power as an object of punishment. But with the shift to the historico-political domain of biopower, the body becomes an object of knowledge, an epistemological construction. What is

normativized is knowable, governable, and profitable. Thus it is pressing to discover an understanding of the body which undoes this biopolitical thought, which escapes it – that is, what I will argue is the heterogeneous body.

If biopower rests upon an understanding of the human as *homo œconomicus*, this means life has been constrained to follow the directed route of an economic rationale, one that can only be grounded in a Bataillean *restricted economy*. None of Bataille's concepts may be deracinated from the entirety of their usage throughout his oeuvre; nor, however, can we trace a clear evolution of any of them over time, by which an appearance of one or the other of them within a particular work would constitute the final, definitive conceptualization, the flowering of his work. Instead, each concept is a complex of thought whose meaning changes depending upon which other texts one uses to illuminate it. The foundations for the Bataillean concept of restricted economy, and of its counter, general economy, can be found in Bataille's early essays "The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade" and "The Notion of Expenditure." In the essay on Sade, a useful application of his philosophy to literature, Bataille begins by considering admirers of Sade's work, who nevertheless feel compelled to excuse their admiration by claiming that the offensive elements of Sade's writing are somehow beyond reality. Bataille instead wants a direct vindication of Sade. In order to accomplish this, he employs the twin categories of "appropriation" and "excretion," which are polar ends of process, whether one is speaking of biological, material, artistic, or philosophical processes. Appropriation is an assimilative process, one in which a foreign body is absorbed, made homogeneous; excretion is the repulsion of a foreign body, a heterogeneous body, a sacred body. In

terms of thematics, Sade's narratives often oscillate between the modes of appropriation (often in its simple form of oral consumption) and excretion.

From the subject matter of Sade's work, Bataille proceeds to thought itself and considers how both science and philosophy, as homogeneous processes, attempt to identify the world through a series of similar, concatenated categories and classifications – but, he argues, philosophy possesses an advantage over science in that philosophy may choose to consider its own waste products, become a heterology. This heterology would be akin to religion, except it would reject the seemingly ineradicable tendency of religion toward appropriation, which results in a God who is a "simple (paternal) sign of universal homogeneity" (96), or, tracing out both Bataille's debt to and departure from Hegel, Absolute Spirit: Bataille wishes to hurl along a different dialectical trajectory, one which is never completed. In the conclusion of his essay, Bataille looks to the revolutionary political implications of heterological process. The human need for the violent and orgiastic character of the heterogenous, the sacred, is denied, but forms the basis for the "accursed exploitation" of man by man (99). While a revolution may reorganize the political and economic system, it will not achieve its true revolutionary goal until this need for the heterogeneous has been recognized and met. Some other means for achieving it must be found.

In "The Notion of Expenditure," published a few years after "The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade," Bataille deploys similar ideas anthropologically to offer a cursory analysis of expenditure in the realm of human activity. Bataille begins, in the first section entitled "The Insufficiency of the Classical Principle of Utility," by showing the limitations of the concept of utility in understanding human behavior. Utility can only

proffer a rational understanding of human behavior, one that brooks no violence or excess. Even art and play are "reduced to a diversion whose role is subsidiary" (117). But, as Bataille points out, while in thought humanity is like a "minor" standing before its father – tame and subservient – in practice, humanity exists at the "limits of horror," possessing "savage needs." Just as the Freudian pleasure principle is opposed by the death drive, Bataille analogously counterpoises to the principle of utility a "principle of loss," both pairings striking in their seeming irrationality.

Influenced by Nietzsche and Mauss, Bataille argues that "expenditure" should be used to designate "unproductive forms," in which "the accent is placed on a *loss* that must be as great as possible in order for that activity to take on its true meaning" ("Notion" 118). He looks at an array of human cultural productions such as jewels, cults and sacrifices, competitive games, and art, which permits symbolic expenditure (I will examine the capacity of art to enact loss in more detail later). Expenditure is the unacknowledged foundation of all economic processes: "at its *base* exchange presents itself as a process of expenditure, over which a process of acquisition has been developed" (121). Production and acquisition (or conservation) are relations of "an *end* with *utility*" (120). Bataille reviews Mauss's research into the practice of potlatch and then examines how aspects of this form of exchange have persisted into the present day. As he notes, potlatch was an agonistic form of exchange, and the agonistic character of social expenditure is still present, if not terribly increased, in the economic mode most prevalent in contemporary times: in capitalism, the bosses are "preoccupied…with showing that they do not in any way share the abjection of the men they employ. *The end of the workers' activity is to produce in order to live, but the bosses' activity is to*

produce in order to condemn the working producers to a hideous degradation" (126). In other words, social expenditure is intimately connected to both bare life – in Bataille's rudimentary theorization of it as production which guarantees only the basest form of existence – and to a capitalist economic system through its shoring up of social class hierarchies.

In the same passage from which the above quote is drawn, Bataille notes that wealthy individuals in the modern capitalist state make attempts to ameliorate the conditions of poverty, but these are essentially apologias, empty gestures that allow the owners of capital to evade recognition of "the results of their own destructive acts" and "do not modify in any way the fundamental division between noble and ignoble men." These statements of Bataille's are significant for a number of reasons. The first is that the crudest, conservative readings of Bataille's work might well assume that Bataille's understanding of expenditure and, later, restricted and general economy, in some way conforms to the cynical popular belief in the inherent inequality of individuals, an inequality which is never truly eradicated but only slightly ameliorated through a type of "trickle-down effect" of expenditure: let the wealthy consume ecstatically and the rest of us will benefit (presumably as either direct philanthropic recipients or through the production necessary to supply the wealthy with the needed materials for their excesses). But as Bataille argues, "everything that was generous, orgiastic, and excessive has disappeared" (124). All that is left is "trickery…for those who lack the courage to condemn this moldy society to revolutionary destruction." (126). The wealth of the upper and middle classes is subject to the principle of conservation, and is only occasionally

subject to an impoverished form of display. Thus, we see here that there can be qualitative differences in the practice of expenditure.

Additionally, his statements on the empty gestures of charity and minor redistributions of wealth also correspond to Foucault's later theorization of the neoliberal state. On the surface, the connection is maybe unclear. Bataille would seem to be talking about a welfare state. However, the aspect of it which should be highlighted is its minimal quality. This redistribution is only a "representation." Foucault, in The Birth of Biopolitics, says that neoliberals "obey as law the economic game and its unequal effects," and the only equalizing measure may be to take from the extreme of luxury consumption and give to the most destitute. The government only intercedes in order to ensure that competitive mechanisms operate to their fullest extent. It relies only on an absolute or relative definition of poverty, and below or at the threshold, there will be "a population which…will be constantly moving between, on the one hand, assistance provided in certain eventualities when it falls below the threshold and, on the other, both its use and its availability for use according to economic needs and possibilities. It will therefore be a kind of infra- and supra-liminal floating population…a constant reserve of manpower" (206). They are guaranteed merely a "minimal existence," or bare life.

Interestingly, in "The Notion of Expenditure," Bataille goes on to claim that "class struggle…becomes the grandest form of social expenditure when it…threatens the very existence of the masters." While a consideration of the full implications of such a blatantly Marxist revolutionary sentiment is not appropriate in this space, the statement is important for two reasons: 1) it suggests that the practice of expenditure is not limited to possessors of wealth, and 2) it tantalizingly raises the possibility of collective

expenditure, significant not just for the immediately obvious consequences for class struggle, but also because of the implicit assumption that expenditure is not dependent upon the action of a singular subject, motivated by its ego. These consequences will play a role in Bataille's later work on restricted and general economy.

He develops the idea of expenditure into a more sweeping conceptual distinction between restricted economy and general economy more fully *The Accursed Share, 3 Vols.* Restricted economy is one in which the principle of growth entails that all energy circulating in a system is subsumed through accumulation. To put it in Nietzschean terms Bataille would recognize, is the economy of life for "the last man" and represents the peak of the post-Enlightenment instrumentalization of all dimensions of life for the purposes of material production and consumption and the quantification of all aspects of this process. General economy, in contrast, is the total non-productive expenditure of energies and goods so typical of the sacred. Bataille intends this distinction to characterize in a more broadly cultural way different patterns of behavior and practice among cultures and/or between different moments within the history of any one culture

It is important to distinguish here between Bataille's theorization of restricted economy and general economy and to avoid a misreading of *The Accursed Share*. Bataille does not claim that our world operates according to a principle of restricted economy and thus, that it is imperative for us to transform the world into one founded upon general economy. His argument is instead that our world, "considered in general," operates according to a law of general economy and we only tragically try to impose principles of restricted economy on it (the "process of acquisition" developed over the base of expenditure mentioned in his earlier essay) – tragically because there is always

excess which threatens to destroy us (22). It is a mistake of perspective. “Economic activity,” he argues, “is conceived in terms of particular operations with limited ends…Economic science merely generalizes the isolated situation; it restricts its object to operations carried out with a view to a limited man, that of economic man” (*TAS* 23). Herein, need it be pointed out, lies the foundations of Foucault’s *homo œconomicus*.

We may bring together Foucault’s theorization of *homo œconomicus*, Bataille’s restricted and general economy, and Esposito’s attempt to formulate a positive biopolitics through a consideration of what might be seen as the other side of the profit motive, which is risk, occasionally engaged in as a means of rapidly accumulating profit, but more generally eschewed. (Risk undertaken as a means of garnering more profit is a tactic available primarily to those who already possess great capital.) Before considering the biopolitical significance of risk, it is useful to review Derrida’s assessment of risk’s position in Bataille’s philosophy. Derrida looks specifically to the Hegelian roots of risk in "From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve." It is Bataille's interrogation of the Hegelian concept of risk, his extension and elevation of it to a central position in his thought, which allowed Bataille to "put into question the idea of meaning of the chain in Hegelian reason, but did so by thinking the chain as such, in its totality, without ignoring its internal rigor" (253) and ultimately allowed him to ask how one can think what "exceeds the oppositions of concepts governed by this communal logic.” This resembles, of course, Derrida's own method of deconstructionism - perhaps

no coincidence, given that both his essay on Bataille and his most famous work, *Of Grammatology*, were published in 1967[ii].

Bataille's insight into the Hegelian dialectic is to translate Hegelian lordship into a Bataillean sovereignty which, unlike the Hegelian master, *continues* to risk. The Hegelian master, in the common Kojeve-influenced reading of Hegel, is raised to his position by his willingness to risk death, to put it all at stake. But lordship "has a meaning. The putting at stake of life is a moment in the constitution of meaning, in the presentation of essence and truth...For history – that is, meaning – to form a continuous chain...the master must experience his truth" (254)[iii]. Thus, the master must then preserve his life, which constitutes his repressed servility. The condition of the slave's existence is to inhibit his desire and delay the disappearance of the thing(s) upon which his existence depends.

[ii] In an article for the journal *Postmodern Culture*, Steven Helmling argues that Derrida does not "deconstruct" Bataille in "From Restricted to General Economy" but simplistically celebrates him. The point is not without merit, however, Helmling unfortunately undermines his own argument by claiming that Derrida's failure of "rigor" results from inattention to the fact that, in Helmling's assessment, "For Bataille, all it takes to escape 'economy' is a little sex and violence" (18). This is the crude popular take on Bataille.

[iii] Chris Gemerchak, who has written recently upon Bataille's Hegelian inheritance, argues vehemently against the significance of the master's experience of truth, which he views as an anthropocentrism inherited from Kojève's interpretation of Hegel. The anthropocentrism rests upon the circularity of the system - "the teleological orientation that inserts becoming within an anticipative horizon of closure relative to which every moment derives its meaning" (36). Kojève claimed Hegel "identifies the Concept (God) with Time (Man, negativity), and therefore with History, so that Being (God) reveals itself through discourse in the world." In other words, "truth is not granted to a transcendent God, but rather to human existence in the world." Bataille, however, explicitly disagreed with Kojève on this point - he viewed Hegel as a theist. Bataille saw that the phenomenology precluded satisfaction for humanity; there is a particular satisfaction available only to the Absolute. But Gemarchak and Derrida's analyses essentially end at the same consequence, which is Bataille's attempt to question the *Aufhebung* or sublation of the dialectic and the dialectic in general.

The master's life thus preserves itself: having risked its death, risked its negation, it triumphs and then preserves what it has sublated. To do otherwise, would be to "rush headlong into death and risk the absolute loss of meaning" (255), a nonproductive death, or abstract negativity. Sovereignty laughs at this Aufhebung and laughs at itself, says Derrida, but there is no laughter in the original Hegelian system. Sovereignty, however, is not outside dialectics; instead, sovereignty provides the economy of reason with its element, its milieu, its unlimiting boundaries of non-sense.

For Derrida, this leads directly into discourse, as one might assume. But for the moment, I am more interested in how risk functions in relation to *homo œconomicus* and biopolitics. Foucault suggests that in a neoliberal economy the primary political-economic goal is to allow the individual to insure himself against risk. Risk and the reduction of risk become paramount. The very basis for accumulation and the siphoning of energy within a system is to minimize risk, to protect oneself against the future and contingencies – the essence of a restricted economy. Similarly, Esposito's notion of immunity rests upon the reduction of risk. Immunity allows the body (whether a cell body, the human body, or the social body) to inoculate itself against the risk or threat posed by other foreign bodies, those outside the system. This mechanism secures the community and provides self-definition, a limiting of its boundaries, but when unbounded or even stoked, this same mechanism is an ideological tool, leading to xenophobia in its crudest forms, but also fostering a cultural psychology of anxiety which allows acquiesces to a state of exception and the reduction to bare life. Esposito describes the immunitary dynamic in its modern fulfillment as Nazi thanatopolitics, a "dialectic that is bound to condition the strengthening of life vis-à-vis the ever more

extensive realization of death" (9). This fear of the foreign provides an important corrective to Foucault's claim that the process of exclusion or marginalization is irrelevant at this historical juncture. We might hypothesize the change as one in which actual marginalization has been reduced by the diminishment of the juridical constraints upon minority groups and the democratization of consumerism, but that the phatasmatic Other, one often disassociated from any particular excluded group, persists as a general threat. This generalized threat arouses an anxiety which pervades relations between individuals, sequestering each from the other.

I feel compelled to ask, however, whether this same mechanism does not provoke an immunological reaction against the individual's own body. Of course, the concepts of risk, immunity, and security encompass a general fear of death: the agonistics at the heart of the master-slave relationship depend upon this fear of the cessation of the individual existence, its passage into nothingness or negativity. But immunity carries with it connotations of a part-body, organs divided from other organs, and consequently each aspect of the body, considered separately, may serve the function of either self-defense…or self-sabotage. Thus, the individual comes to regard his or her body in its various parts, all possible carriers of contagion, all susceptible to the decay of the human body. Neither the inevitability of decay nor the futility of efforts to ward off contagion is enough to stop the disinfecting, masking odors, nipping and tucking, dieting – slave mentality, indeed. The minor turn in contemporary society towards holistic care is a reaction to the pervading approach towards the body, but one that is incapable of stemming the fragmentation. Even if it could, it would only be a return to the more generalized avoidance of risk as it is still *care*.

Esposito argues what is needed is “aporetic exposure,” in which individuals countenance their doubts and willingly choose to expose themselves to one another. This is the foundation of his positive biopolitics, opposed to the Nazi thanatopolitics. In Bataillean terms, this is the practice of the morality of the summit, an idea he proposes in *On Nietzsche*. Bataille undertakes his own Nietzschean genealogical survey, which he begins with the observation that the good is traditionally that which is good for the individual and evil is that which acts against the individual’s interests. He then reverses this conceptual polarity by suggesting that the good is the interest of others and evil that which keeps individual existences separate. But he is uninterested in pursuing this simple reversal and proposes two new moral ideas whose valences are slightly aslant from those of good and evil: the morality of the summit and that of decline. The moral summit is a violent pitch of excessive expenditure, requiring “individuals whose separate existence in themselves is *risked*,” thereby dissolving the boundaries between subject and object and achieving communication (19). This idea of risk is grounded in Bataille’s Hegelianism as Derrida noted. This aligns the moral summit more closely with the traditional idea of evil, although the two are not synonymous.

Here, as in his work *Guilty*, Bataille attempts to eradicate the classic opposition between the individual and the collective, but he does so without reducing either term to the other. These efforts have been variously interpreted. Jean-Luc Nancy, like others, posits Bataille’s central concern as the unavoidable conflict between the sovereign individual and the community, which Nancy believes was the result of Bataille’s disillusionment with communism, because in its practice it destroyed the sovereignty of the individual, and of his horror at fascism, or community gone mad. These realizations

in Bataille's thought prompted an awakening that led to the revision of his previous philosophy of community. According to Nancy, Bataille began to privilege communication over community and being over the idea of the individual. The being-in-communication is being-outside-itself, a condition that is not possible for the subject which takes the object as its representative other pole, a model of communication based on alterity, which entails that the other "becomes the object of a subject" (23-4). Nancy believes this being-outside-itself of community is *not* a state of sublation: there is no individual who is sublated into the community.

However, in *Guilty*, Bataille does suggest that there is something like an individual: "particularity is necessary for loss and fusion. Without particularity…nothing would be 'set free'" (34). Esposito, in contrast to Nancy, interprets Bataille's work to say that the individual existence is sublated within the collective – only to subsequently undergo individuation and then, again, further sublation, and he will further this idea in his discussion of Gilbert Simondon's "transindividual." He advances his own argument regarding the metaphor of birth to suggest that "the individual (or better, the subject) that is produced by individuating itself is not definable outside of the political relationship with those that share the same vital experience, but also with that collective, which far from being its simple contrary or the neutralization of individuality, is itself a form of more elaborate individuation" (*Bios* 181). Although Esposito's articulation of individuation hardly exhibits the ecstatic qualities of Bataille's descriptive language and Esposito's explicitly political cast on individual-collective relations does not quite accord with Bataille's philosophy (in *On Nietzsche* he provocatively says of art lovers in galleries that "inside of us we eventually kill off whatever isn't grossly political" (8)),

Esposito and Bataille nevertheless share a concern with overturning of the understanding of the individual's relationship to the collective as an antithetical one – and this overturning is dependent upon the acceptance of exposure and the repudiation of restricted economy's twin pillars of the profit-motive and risk-avoidance.

We need, as Bataille claims, "a reversal of thinking – and of ethics" (*The Accursed Share* 25). The ethical imperative is to recognize this, to engineer our own moment of anagnorisis and then proceed accordingly. The artists I will discuss in the following chapter illuminate such a path. To understand how these artists accomplish this, we must begin to formulate a Bataillean aesthetic. Traditionally, evaluations of Bataille's contributions to critical theory focus on his importance as a post-structuralist thinker. Derrida and Foucault both viewed Bataille's project as a serious engagement with and rethinking of the Hegelian dialectic and the philosophical subject. Derrida's essay on Bataille is discussed in part above; what Derrida goes on to consider is "the writing of sovereignty," or writing that follows general economy. Writing cannot be sovereignty itself, says Derrida: writing as part of discourse, always participates in the construction of meaning, and what is more, Derrida claims "there is no sovereignty *itself*" because sovereignty dissolves "meaning, truth, and a *grasp-of-the-thing-itself*" (270). But what the writing of sovereignty *can* do is place "discourse *in relation* to absolute non-discourse…it is not the loss of meaning, but, as we have just read, the 'relation to this loss of meaning.'" Derrida examines Bataille's own writing, with its multiple deployments of words, which take on new meanings across his various works. This writing proceeds to "make sense slide, to denounce it or to deviate from it" (272), and in

order to truly read Bataille, one must not attempt to subordinate these to a system of meaning.

In accordance with Derrida's and Foucault's readings of Bataille, critics like Denis Hollier and Julian Pefanis, among others, emphasize the anti-systematic, anti-totalizing aspects of Bataille's work, and see his writing as an exemplar of *écriture*, writing as philosophy, with its endless play of differences, deferrals, and traces. For these critics, Bataille's aesthetic principles are largely held to be deducible from his writing insofar as it is post-structuralist – that is, if his aesthetics are considered explicitly at all. Derrida notes that Bataille distinguishes between poetic or ecstatic language and "significative discourse," but attempts to gloss over this difference by suggesting that the "poetic or the ecstatic is that *in every discourse* which can open itself up to the absolute loss of its sense, to the (non-)base of the sacred, of nonmeaning, of un-knowledge or of play" (261). Hollier, writing on Bataille in 1966, one year before Derrida's essay was published, more properly described elaborates a structuralist reading of Bataille, rather than a poststructuralist one, but it is only a small step from one to the other. Hollier believes that the interest of Bataille's theory is not "economic or anthropological" but "epistemological" and states, "Rational thought plans, unifies, leading – in accordance with the principle of identity…it reduces everything by translating it into terms of equation and everything soon slumbers under the light of the Same. The awakening of thought, in which thought occurs as a heterogeneous event, as a break in homogeneity, thus prompts dualism." (70, 60-1). Pefanis agrees that writing which participates in Bataillean general economy is opposed to "the system of identities in economic and

philosophical thought based on equivalence," and thus postmodern aesthetics are Bataillean because they are "manifestations of the *thought of nonidentity*" (5).

In general, critical takes on Bataille, such as those in the numerous academic introductions that have been published in recent years, highlight his contribution to post-structuralism: Stuart Kendall in *Georges Bataille* says "The post-structuralist trend in Western though is in fact impossible to imagine without [Bataille]" (8); Benjamin Noys in *Georges Bataille: A Critical Introduction* states that "As poststructuralism will change our thinking about Bataille, so Bataille will also change how we think about poststructuralism" (16); and Fred Botting and Scott Wilson begin the second paragraph of the introduction to their work thus: "Bataille. The name informs poststructuralism, and yet eludes even that amorphous category, sliding beneath and beyond it. It also *informes* poststructuralism to play on the French word for formless" (2).

If I offer that analyses of Bataille's work, and correspondingly his aesthetics, in terms of poststructuralism feel a bit limited, I certainly do not intend to disparage these analyses – only to suggest 1) that we might open up the framework and 2) that unfortunately, the aesthetics often are left behind. In fact, the more recent pieces of criticism cited above often tacitly acknowledge a need to move beyond the now traditional interpretation of Bataille as the grandfather of poststructuralism, as when Noys says "I am not arguing that Bataille *is* a poststructuralist, but rather that Bataille is an anachronism, out of his time, thinking poststructuralism before it was even named" (16). It is a tricky noose to escape from. While certainly the *excessive* nature of the artworks I will be considering can – and frequently are – construed as symptomatic of poststructuralism/postmodernism, I hope to extend my argument beyond the usual

valorization of play for play's sake and to avoid the temptation to limit a reading of Bataille and the literature in question to that of periodization.

It is maybe also worth noting that frequently in Bataillean criticism there is a sheepish admission of a failure to live up to the standards of writing, thought, and experience set by Bataille. (As an aside: Nor do I.) Chris Gemarchak, for example, says, "If we cannot repeat [Bataille's] language, we may do well to repeat his gesture -- a religious one, in fact -- for, like a living Zarathustra, he urgently tried to communicate a religious feeling that has been lost" (1). And a few sentences afterwards: "[I]f we, the disintoxicated, are too cautious to revive those burning moments ourselves, an examination of the smouldering remains may at least allow us to realize that there is in fact something we have missed. And this, curiously enough, might just be of equal value to being caught in the moment ourselves." It seems to me, upon cursory examination, that those philosophers – Bataille, Nietzsche, Deleuze, among others – who write philosophy in an aesthetic mode implicitly offer a challenge to critics. They are also the philosophers most maligned and misunderstood. (There are, however, critics who do try to meet this challenge, such as Nick Land in his *Thirst for Annihilation*, but the success of these efforts are questionable.) Can we focus our lens even more and consider why in this historical moment, academic critics on the whole demur from this perceived challenge? The obvious – but no less correct for its obviousness – answer is that the product of an attempt to emulate Bataille would be unprofessional, a *risk* not worth taking. This highlights the transformation of the field of knowledge production by which, as Lyotard contends in *The Postmodern Condition*, knowledge becomes an informational commodity and exchange is prioritized. What does not meet the conditions of exchange,

what seems excessive, is sloughed off. In essence, it seems that Bataillean criticism, too, operates according to a restricted economy, but is maybe self-conscious of its position. Gemerchak's comment is novel in its equivocation that examining Bataille's thought is just as valuable as the sort of lived experience Bataille advocates, which is debatable.

At the very least, such admissions seem to belie Derrida's collapse of the distinction between poetic language and significative discourse in Bataille's work noted previously – for if the distinction truly did not matter, why the need to apologize for one's insufficiency? Or, rather, given that Bataille's own writing did seem to manage a merger between the two such that significative discourse was blended with the poetic to ecstatic effect, it is probably more appropriate to say that what these examples show is the market and ideological constraints on the erotic/ecstatic's place in a range of discursive fields, the field of knowledge production being just one of these. This brings us back to art's role and the question of whether literary language has a specificity denied to other forms of discourse, a question that has had a central place in many of the debates of twentieth-century literary theory. And unfortunately one cannot abstract such a role from art's position within the horizon of contemporary capitalism. For Bataille, attuned to the debasement of human activity by capitalism, the issue is whether, after many of the functions of religion have been superseded by, substituted for, or obviated by those of capitalism, art is able to find a beyond to capitalism. In Bataille's *Inner Experience* he questions whether dramatization in art can have the same effect that sacrifice did in religion (11). If after the "death of God," culture is only left with the paltry religion of consumerism, the dramatization of consumption whose point of intensity is the purchase and exercising of one's taste and whose sacrifice is the exchange and death of other-

styled selves, an endless postmodern oniomania, by the light of which seemingly revolutionary ideas of the subject such as Haraway's cyborg become an infinitely recursive "will-to-will" (O'Hara), how is art to overcome the accumulative and assimilationist tendencies of the modern aesthetic in order to take us beyond the hard, cold reality of consumer materialism?

Numerous Marxist theorists have outlined the ways in which economic conditions have historically structured aesthetics. Before proceeding to a discussion of specific theorists, I would like to consider for a moment how a number of these Marxist formalist critics use the language of scandal, transgression, or embarrassment when they discuss the relation of the economic base to the cultural superstructure. Jean-Joseph Goux has noted that "At the heart of Bataille's thought lies the troubling postulate that the distinction between the profane and the sacred - a fundamental distinction of all human society - emerges in a broad sense from the economic." (207). Jameson, in his discussion of the transition between multi-volume and single-volume works and George Gissing in *The Political Unconscious*, has noted such a disturbing effect of positing that an economic rational underlies aesthetic form: "That a material and contingent 'accident' should leave its trace as a formal 'break' and 'cause' modification in Gissing's narrative categories as well as in the very 'structure of feeling' in his novels – this is no doubt a *scandalous* assertion," a result he argues which proceeds from the separation of use value and exchange value in culture (26; emphasis mine). Pierre Bourdieu, in his work *Distinction*, posits culture as the present incarnation of the sacred and positions himself as a transgressor of the sacred because he dares to break the taboo "of relating intellectual products and producers to their social conditions of existence" through an "objective"

view. This, in addition to being somewhat self-aggrandizing, would also seem to be a bit of a misreading of "transgression," at least in the Bataillean sense, which would not typically characterize the assumption of an objective stance as transgressive. Nevertheless, this statement does connect to that of Jameson's regarding the "troubling" quality of the pervasiveness of the economic rationale. Bourdieu's claim is slightly different from Jameson's, more about how economic considerations inform what we consume and how we define ourselves rather than what we produce. But all of these writers seem to point to a certain willful blindness regarding the relation between base and superstructure – or, as Bourdieu's statement indicates, a general taboo in aesthetic theory to consider such "base" (in a different sense) concerns.

Of those who do take Marxist/materialist approaches, I wish to consider here only two, Jameson and Bourdieu, who in certain respective works treat different aspects of the production-consumption spectrum: Jameson in *The Political Unconscious* looks at both the constitution of the aesthetic object as determined by the mode of production and interpretation's relation to the mode of production, the grand materialist horizon of interpretation. Bourdieu, in *Distinction*, on the other hand, is more concerned with how taste, an effect of the social structure, comes to inform social relations   Fredric Jameson, in *The Political Unconscious*, defends the use of the Marxian interpretive framework as an "untranscendable horizon" for interpretation: in his hermeneutic theory, the aesthetic object, its form and content and possibilities for linguistic specificity, are determined by history; the subject approaches the aesthetic object only through previous interpretations to apply his own master interpretive code, which in late capitalism, is – or ultimately *should* be, according to Jameson - a Marxist one (5-6). The goal of criticism is to restore

the political specificity of aesthetic objects. In the same work, Jameson reviews the different types of causality which historical criticism has used to support its claims – the mechanistic, totalization, and structural immanence; while his discussion is interesting, I will leave off further consideration of its technical aspects. Jameson's analysis is useful to my own for his theorization of the mode of production not as the narrowly economic, but as the structure of synchronic social relations as a whole, available only as an absent cause – my focus is on the current phase of late capitalism, which manifests itself through neoliberalism and biopolitics. What narrative analysis must do is to attend to "those narrative frames or containment strategies which seek to endow their objects of representation with formal unity" while they are simultaneously unable to represent the absent cause and its effect (54). As we will see, for the artists under consideration in the current socioeconomic situation, it is the body which is presented in general culture as possessing a formal unity.

Bourdieu's work, despite its tendency to reify the categories of pure taste and popular taste, is useful for the bridge it builds between economics and taste: on the production end of the spectrum, there is a market imperative for propagating the aesthetic standards of both pure and popular taste and, on the reception end, a socio-historical imperative for accepting them. He suggests that "the mode of expression characteristic of a cultural production always depends on the laws of the market in which it is offered" (xii). There would seem to be no escape: every aspect of culture is subsumed by the historico-materialist necessity of confirming and conforming to one's social status through a recognition of and adherence to class-specific norms. As he describes, "There is an economy of cultural goods, but it has a specific logic," while the "eye" for the

aesthetically pleasing is a product of history reproduced by education (1, 3). The role of taste, then, for Bourdieu? "Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier" (6). The restricted economy practiced by the biopolitical regime becomes replicated in culture, transforming it into a cultural economy, through the extension of the enterprise model to culture: one *advances* oneself by exercising one's taste, and self-expression is a joke as it is only one of many commodities rather than some truth of the individual.

Homo œconomicus possesses an aesthetic sense, but one wherein appreciation of a cultural object is a form of symbolic consumption which supports the business venture of one's self-enterprise. In this view, the aesthetic object is useful only insofar as it allows *Homo œconomicus* to assume and discard the object and the associated identity or appearance it has enabled. Aesthetic objects are accessories, fetish objects, and you consume them as you would any other consumer good designed to satisfy your needs. And from the production end of the spectrum? A whole market of cultural goods commissioned to meet the needs of ever more specifically identified target audiences, displaying the interdependency of immaterial labor and immaterial consumption. Is it any surprise that the consumer presented with a supermarket with its wares displayed on effulgent shelves that feels in some part designed for *for me*, a department store designed *for me*, a mall designed *for me*, sees even aesthetic objects as consumer goods whose fit and function are evaluated as one would a new pair of jeans, a riding lawn mower, or a gingerbread latte? And that the consumer then appends aesthetic objects and their related categories to his or her identity through the hash tags and "likes" of social media? It comes as no surprise, perhaps, because Bourdieu's consuming subject is an eminently rational actor, and would seem to possess agency - or at least an agency that exercises

choice among a predetermined selection of goods. Unlike the portrait painted by Adorno and Horkheimer in "The Culture Industry" of the consumer of cultural goods who appears naïve and easily swayed, Bourdieu's is a rational actor making practical choices for his or her own life – insofar as one's exhibition of class status is practical. This identity-affirming and psychologically satisfying function of contemporary taste and consumption is at least one of the symptoms of postmodernism that leads Jameson to suggest that the affect generated by postmodernist works is "free-floating" and "tends towards euphoria" (*Postmodernism* 15-6).

The seemingly endless differentiation (I am tempted to call it attenuation) of aesthetic categories which both create and satisfy consumer needs and effect an objective and subjective "branding" of the consumer have resulted in the hatching of a new approach in aesthetic theory which we might term an aesthetics of the minor. Sianne Ngai's most recent work is entitled Our *Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting*, and in it she looks at how these categories of commodified art produce novel forms of affect for the postmodern subject. The study of "small things," as she herself characterizes it, is important because these things not only "index economic processes, but also because they give us insight into major problems in aesthetic theory that continue to inform the making, dissemination, and reception of culture in the present" (4, 2). Daniel Harris has performed a similar analysis in *Cute, Quaint, Hungry and Romantic: The Aesthetics of Consumerism*, wherein he states that his "voyage into the aesthetic unconsciousness places the refuse of consumerism under a microscope and concentrates on minutiae, on the uses of the useless, the significance of the insignificant" (xi). Both of these works orient themselves to the practices of consumption: how and why we consume

what we do. The "popular aesthetic category" is not an oxymoron in these works, and aesthetic categories offer something like an indexing of popular taste and consumption.

These analyses of postmodern aesthetic categories are undoubtedly valuable. They also mark a small, but significant repudiation of the poststructualist insistence that the aesthetic object is just another discursive form among many others, with no particular aesthetic specificity, whose characteristics are best interpreted through reference to the extra-aesthetic of social relations. Glancing briefly backwards, New Criticism's emphasis on the autonomy of the aesthetic object and its consequent transcendental social function gave way to a poststructuralism which, for the most part, replaced concern with the specifically aesthetic in favor of an emphasis on art's relation to the social reality from which it is drawn. Specifically aesthetic elements, formal elements, were relegated them to secondary status, cultural signifiers among many others. In contrast, critics like Ngai and Harris argue for a continued exploration of the aesthetic's role in our everyday lives.

However, what these critics do preserve of the recent critical tradition is a disbelief in the possibility of transgression. Or rather – to soften the previous statement a bit – their focus of study is only that closed circuit of late capitalism, production-exchange-consumption, and the use-value of the elements which are part of it. (Arguably, Ngai's earlier work *Ugly Feelings*, does attempt to look at how certain aesthetic objects produce affect which is at least ill-fitted to the circuit, but the matter is a complicated one which I will examine more closely in the following chapter.) Similarly, Bourdieu's implicitly structuralist position puts forward a closed-system, the limits of which it is impossible to escape, and indeed, when discussing the possibility for transgression, Bourdieu proposes an extremely limited version: "Aesthetic intention can contradict

those norms which define for the social classes legitimate objects and modes of representation, what is representable. Thus one 'shocks' the bourgeois by conferring aesthetic status on objects and modes by 'transgressing' such ethical censorships" (47). This is a "symbolic" transgression, which lacks the seriousness of the revolutionary (48). There are a number of problems with Bourdieu's theorization. While not wanting to return to some Hegelian notion of Spirit, the process of historical change becomes atomized: gone is the dialectic, gone is the motor of historical change. Though Bourdieu clearly is making a historical materialist argument, transgression in his formulation is essentially gutted of historical import.

The cultural significance of Duchamp's *Fountain* notwithstanding, a truly Bataillean aesthetic will grant to aesthetic objects a power of transgression that goes beyond the simple shock of reversing or confusing distinctions between high and low cultural objects. The limitations of pieces such as Duchamp's reside in their foregrounding of the mode of representation in the hallowed field of high culture, a field circumscribed by relatively narrow socioeconomic aesthetic conditions, as opposed to interrogating the formal qualities of the "work" or the broader sociohistorical factors which structure its conditions of representation. (Arguably, Duchamp's work provoked the response it did because its transgression was so localized. While it may be true that in general transgression of the strictures of a localized field result in a more powerful reaction, the dilution of the effects of broader transgression is not guaranteed.) If we do wish to move beyond a transgressive aesthetics based on something more than a conflation of the high and the low, we need to return to Bataille; however, in Bataille's

oeuvre there are relatively few statements of an aesthetic formalist nature, a dearth whose peculiarity has been noted by frustrated critics.

These few statements are provocative, though – and certainly it is possible to extrapolate from the vast resources of his philosophy. One of these statements proved to be the catalyst for a critical fervor a few decades ago. In the critical "dictionary," one of the incomplete projects Bataille directed which was published in *Documents* under Bataille's editorship, was the following entry for "Formless" (which follows "Factory Chimney" and precedes an incisive commentary on "Hygiene"):

> "A dictionary would begin as of the moment when it no longer provided the meanings of words but their tasks. In this way formless is not only an adjective having such and such a meaning, but a term serving to declassify, requiring in general that every thing should have a form [sic]. What it designates does not, in any sense whatever, possess rights, and everywhere gets crushed like a spider or an earthworm. For academics to be satisfied, it would be necessary, in effect, for the universe to take on a form. The whole of philosophy has no other aim; it is a question of fitting what exists into a frock-coat, a mathematical frock-coat. To affirm on the contrary that the universe resembles nothing at all and is only *formless*, amounts to saying that the universe is something akin to a spider or a gob of spittle." (*Encyclopedia* 52).

It seems such a small passage to have created the fervor it did; moreover, it does not seem to contain much that is not present elsewhere in Bataille's more developed works (except, as we will see, an indefinite allusion to Kant), yet *l'informe* proved compelling to the art

world in 1996 when it gained critical renown with an art exhibition at the Centres Georges Pompidou. The curators, Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, later presented the exhibition in their book *Formless: A User's Guide*. As this occasioned one of the few critical trends in which Bataille was regarded as a formalist (of sorts…formlessnist, perhaps?), it is material to provide an overview of the affair and ensuing debate.

The introduction to the book is insightful. The authors open with a discussion of Manet's *Olympia*, which was the subject of an essay by Bataille. As they describe, the reactions to *Olympia* were traditionally split along the form/content divide. Those who argued in favor of the painting's significance typically saw the subject matter as just a holder for the form rather than vice versa and thus concluded it was the first "modernist" painting, a breakthrough achievement, while those who were preoccupied with the content were aghast. Bataille's essay on the painting has been interpreted as a (simple) support for the painting's formal accomplishments, but they argue that this has been a misreading of Bataille, that the essay's praise for the formal qualities was in fact Bataille's gloss of Andre Malraux's opinion. According to Bois and Krauss, Bataille's position is more complex: "If the *Olympia* caused a scandal, Bataille argues, it was because by means of it Manet refused the various ideological and formal codes regulating the depiction of the nude, whether erotic, mythological, or even realistic" (Bois and Krauss 15). There is a slippage or uprooting that occurs, an operation that displaces both form and content: the content is treated indifferently, the form defies expectations of it – nudity as such is unimportant, but the manner in which nudity is supposed to be represented is transgressed. This is, according to Bois and Krauss, a version of Bataille's *informe*, or the formless. They say an operation is "neither a theme, nor a substance, nor a

concept" (15), which is a means, for them if not Bataille, of resisting a history or a genealogy. The refusal to name the formless as a concept is a means of resisting the dialectical instrumentalization of concepts with its emphasis on identity and progressive, productive movement. Thus the operation or transgression is emptied of relation to the concept (of nudity) and constitutes only a negation of norms.

Bois and Krauss's version of the informe is compelling in its presentation as process or operation. They choose to engage the informe as a means of disrupting artistic periodization. As they describe it: "Our project is to redeal modernism's cards – not to bury it and conduct the manic mourning to which a certain type of "post-modernism" has devoted itself for many years now, but to see to it that the unity of modernism, as constituted through the opposition of formalism and iconology, will be fissured from within and that certain works will no longer be read as they were before." Critic Richard Williams, in his essay "Informe and 'Anti Form,'" repudiates Bois and Krauss's claim of re-articulating modernism in a complex way, and argues that instead the exhibition simply presented artworks that might be characterized as "low art": in other words, an emphasis on the reversal of high and low art, which I discussed previously with regard to Bourdieu. Paul Hegarty (writing separately, but both pieces are collected in the anthology *The Beast at Heaven's Gate: Georges Bataille and the Art of Transgression*), also objects to Bois and Krauss's use of the informe. Hegarty's dispute with the curators of the exhibition rests on what he views as their dogmatic insistence that the informe be a removal of form in what amounts to an "attack on form," whereby the results of the operation are negligible, and the informe thus becomes a definition rather than their proposed operation – and thus what Bataille cautions against in the original entry for the

formless. This assessment is echoed by Joan Hugo in a review of the exhibition in *Frieze* magazine who notes that although Bois insisted "that the curatorial purpose was not to define l'informe…the catalogue belie[d] that claim" and later points out that "Bois and Krauss have set up very strict parameters whose rigidity and inflexibility result in inevitable exclusions." What might be more productive, according to Hegarty, would be to shift the balance of perspective a little to honor both the operation and its results, and to claim that the informe is an invisible residue that persists in the final form. It is an impossible attempt to say the unsayable.

Both Williams and Hegarty take issue with Bois and Krauss's position on the abject. In their book, Bois and Krauss dismiss the abject as a "faddish" concept. Williams notes that Bois and Krauss see it as too "scatological," disturbing because of its reference to bodily functions (147). It is *material*, and therefore antithetical to process. He then characterizes Bois and Krauss's attitude towards the abject as one of repression, an "unwillingness to get their hands dirty" (148). Hegarty, too, objects to the relation of opposition between the abject and informe posited by Bois and Krauss. His guiding question in his essay is whether "the terms abjection and 'inform' [can] be thought together, and if so how?" (73). His answer is that abjection, like the informe, is a process (despite Bois and Krauss's claims to the contrary), that it is not the forms typically associated with the abject, but the process that is constitutive of them. Thus there is a "possible unity between abjection and the 'informe' as structuring devices of an impossible situation" (78). Hegarty does not want to his argument to rest solely on analogy, however, and looks for a "resolution" to the question. This he says resides in both Kristeva and Bataille's literalization of the beyond, the sacred, the impossible, the

abject, which Hegarty calls a "failure" – but this is failure in the Bataillean sense, which is not altogether a bad thing (80). The failure is the moment of the risible and the end of use-value.

Hegarty's essay is titled "As Above, So Below; Informe/Sublime/Abject." Unfortunately, in the collection in which it appears, at the least one sentence is unfinished (it reads: "So process is not alien from abjection, unless" – and nothing follows), but more likely it is missing several paragraphs or even pages as the "sublime" of the title is not mentioned once in the essay as it stands. Clearly, many of the suggestions regarding how we are to interpret the informe are reminiscent of the Kantian sublime, especially if one follows Lyotard's reading of it. The informe, like the sublime, depends upon formlessness and the erasure of boundaries: it is Reason humbled before the immensity of an Idea it cannot synthesize. While Bataille's choice of examples of the informe – a spider and a gob of spittle – does not accord with the immensity requisite for the traditional Kantian sublime (and Robert Frost might object to the suggestion of a spider's formlessness), it is interesting that he chooses examples of the formless which are drawn, like Kant's, from Nature. It seems entirely possible that Bataille was cognizant of Kant's theorization of the sublime and was alluding to it, although with his own Bataillean twist, the debasing of the sublime object, the bringing low of what was high. But this, then, would return us to the low-high distinction and prove to be a dead-end. Either the informe is like the Kantian sublime – or it is different, but only by virtue of a "base materialism," which reverses a conceptual polarity. Surely, given Bataille's explicit disdain of such easy reversals as in his translation of the Nietzschean genealogical project, this cannot be the entirety of his aesthetic program.

Instead, I think the emphasis should be put on the potential *impossibility* (or multiple *impossibilities*) of form. We must then ask: what would be unthinkable or impossible form? Form that can be seen at a distance, but proves to be an illusion when close, a perspectival trick. Form which does not mold its contents. Form which appears...but then is destroyed. Form which undoes itself, leading to formal entropy or is its own death. Each sacred work of literature generates its own principles of anti-form, a negation of its form – and a negation of the world: "This world is wretched, and if poems reveal that fact, what they 'bestow to sight' is what one cannot love. In truth, present-day society is vulgar, and constructed from man's flight from himself, and it hides behind a set design. But poetry that evokes this society is not confined to describing it; it is also the negation of it" ("Stone Age" 153). Though negation and formlessness are not irreconcilable, those who argue that the latter is Bataille's significant contribution to aesthetic theory tend to neglect his statements regarding the former, possibly because an inclusion of negation draws in an intractable dialectical aesthetics. Negation persists in Bataille's philosophy as the sacred, the ethically necessary counterpoint to the profane world of work, totalizing rational thought, and restricted economy.

Not all literature is capable of creating such sacred moments. In his early essays, Bataille appears to want to limit the claims of literature, or maybe the revolutionary intentions of certain movements of literature – although this is purely speculative, it seems likely that this was a pointed attack on surrealism, given the animosity between Bataille and Andre Breton. In one early essay, he argues that while art and literature once possessed the capacity to make the sacred reappear, they can no longer even do that, presumably because, as he explains in "The Use-Value of D.A.F. de Sade," in one of his

relatively rare allusions to aesthetic formalism, that although poetry would seem to be one method of excretory heterology, it, too, like religion, is debased in that it leads onto the "path of a total poetic conception of the world, which ends at any one of a number of aesthetic homogeneities." (97). Art's aspirations to totality potentially, though seemingly not always, lead to "aesthetic homogeneities" or ossification of the rules of art.

But despite his misgivings, later in *Erotism* he declares literature to bear the cultural burden of a now-extinguished religious spirit: "Following upon religion, literature is in fact religion's heir. A sacrifice is a novel, a story, illustrated in a bloody fashion. Or rather a rudimentary form of stage drama reduced to the final episode where the human or animal victim acts it out alone until his death" (87). If the world has been cleaved into the profane and the sacred, art is the means to the sacred against the encroachment of the profane because art allows us to represent, in however a limited way, the chaos of the Real, existence which is not rationally ordered and discontinuous. As Bataille states in his essay "The Sacred," the sacred in literature and art "is only a privileged moment of communal unity, a moment of the convulsive communication of what is ordinarily stifled" (242). What is stifled is our continuousness, and if the boundaries of the flesh naturally mislead us into thinking our existences as separate, a castration of our collective being which is then capitalized upon by the reigning socioeconomic ideology and worked up into a view of the human as homogenized embodiment, then it falls to eroticism to reveal the deception.

It is within the power of art and literature to participate in such eroticism, and to present our existences as unworkable and unprofitable, resistant to a discourse that suggests we may be the master of our lives and our bodies. However, much literature,

especially popular fiction, is dependent upon the reigning ideology of mastery and consumptive satisfaction – which is itself dependent upon the image of the body as normativized, with needs and desires capable of being satisfied. It is not that such literature evades representing pain or death or loss, but that the representations of the body are smoothed over, eased, such that the body never *extrudes* within the narrative. We have access only to reassuring aspects of the body via which DaVinci's Vitruvian man inhabits the narrative tradition regarding bodily representation as a ghost, a perfectly proportioned creature whose order reflects the order of the universe (and thus, André Masson's parody of the Vitruvian man for the first issue of Bataille's journal Ácephale is apropos both for its formal disorder and perversion of content). This perfectly proportioned creature is odorless, indifferent to its appetites, subject to the mind – subject most of all to narrative purpose. Within such literature, there is no space made for representations of the body which are not immediately subsumed to the restricted economy of symbolic production and exchange.

If, that is, the body appears at all – even its part-aspects – because historically literature has tended to avoid the body (and, conversely, art has tended to privilege the figure - a different set of concerns, which I will resist taking up, but will say that the end result is the same). Arendt has powerfully suggested that the body is the quintessence of privacy, property, and invisibility: "Nothing, in fact, is less common and less communicable, and therefore more securely shielded against the visibility and audibility of the public realm, than what goes on within the confines of the body, its pleasures and its pains, its laboring and consuming" (112). This indicates another avenue and thus we see that ideology works by synecdoche to convince us that the body may be shown by

subbing a part for the whole – it is the sublime object of ideology. The artists under review here show the *impossibility* of this, that the totality may not be represented, and in their works the part-aspects manifest the truth of their ideological cast by being presented as excretory objects.

Here, I think, is one of the ways we can distinguish between Kristeva's theorization of the abject and Bataillean heterology (or excretory philosophy, as the case may be). Kristeva says in *The Powers of Horror* that "I experience abjection only if an Other has settled in place and stead of what will be 'me.' Not at all an other with whom I identify and incorporate, but an Other who precedes and possesses me, and through such possession causes me to be" (10). Broadly speaking, this aligns with Althusserian interpellation. It is not a calling of the subject, however, but an occupation of the subject, predicated on domination and symbolic violence. Though both the abjected body and the heterogeneous body horrify, the heterogeneous body in its excretory aspects – enucleated, eviscerated in the works of the artists in question – attracts us even as it is repulsive. It releases a tremendous, uncontrollable energy, the energy that was the tension inherent in the structures of ideology.

It is not only that form constrained by popular expectations is inadequate to the task of displaying the heterogeneous body, but that it *must* be disarrayed, disturbed, impossible for the heterogeneous body to pass through and achieve its fullest impact. When confronted with the heterogeneous body, if our receptive orientation, that set of predetermined expectations and responses, is not also disrupted, much of the potential power of such an attempt at representation is truncated. But just as these representations draw power from the disruption of form and the effect on the reader's consciousness, in

return the set of expectations and responses regarding formal qualities is transformed by this process. The faculty of taste itself is stretched and transformed, and the individual must relinquish expectations and come to expect or desire from the experience of reading only the unexpected. The power of these representations, a power released through both the form and the content that takes the form of an extreme ambivalence towards the heterogeneous body, also allows these works to undermine the affirming affect and identity design that guides most contemporary cultural consumption, impeding our self-curation. Finally, to return to the political, if these works change our consumption patterns, so too do they force us to attempt to identify the biopolitical effects elsewhere in our lives and to locate and interrogate the sources of our bodily representations.

In Bataille's own literature and mixed-genre writing, I believe that the disruption to standards of taste is amplified by his inclusion of a self-consciousness which attempts to countenance its own body. Or rather *attempts* to countenance its own body, which however much the self-consciousness tries, somehow manages to resist these attempts. However, attempts to understand Bataille's philosophy and component aesthetics, whether they are cultural, historical, anthropological, or even the rare formalist undertaking, miss this crucial aspect of his thought, that of the measure of needed self-consciousness. As he himself describes it in *The Accursed Share* (which somewhat paradoxically counts as one of his least subjective and personal works), "The exposition of a general economy implies intervention in public affairs, certainly; but first of all and more profoundly, what it aims at is consciousness...self-consciousness" (41). It is Bataille's emphasis on the necessity of self-awareness as a constituent part of a philosophical exposition that is often neglected in critical commentary on his work. In

Foucault's essay on Bataille, he suggests that Bataille's philosophy of eroticism offers us a language that "continually breaks down at the center of its space" and thus proves to be a "dispersal" of the philosophical subject (39, 41). As the significance of self-consciousness in Bataille's work is neglected, so too is how this self-consciousness approaches the body - and how the body, like the sacred, attracts us, but also horrifies us, particularly in its part-aspects[iv].

In *Guilty*, Bataille's meditation on existence in the midst of war, he turns to the subjective in order to understand what would seemingly lie beyond, in the realm of geopolitics. This was baffling to critics at the time as it appeared to be a scandalous form of omphaloskepsis at a time when action or at least attention to political causes and effects was called for. But it was precisely Bataille's point that it was not ethically advisable to shunt one's subjective experience off to the side in an attempt to use one's reason in a pure manner; such a move amounted to self-protection, the very sort of navel-gazing of which Bataille himself was accused. Instead, Bataille suggests, we must learn to embody that which horrifies: "I practiced, determined to become a war myself" (15).

When one embodies war, one embodies, too, the wounds which characterize war. Bataille had long considered in his other theoretical works the incompletion of man's being and here the wounds of war become a metaphor for this incompletion. And these "wounds" or "lacerations" are what enable communication: "Communication demands a defect, a 'fault.' It enters, like death, through a chink in the armor. It demands a

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[iv] It strikes me that this self-consciousness is what would also distinguish Bataille's work from its contemporary cousins (which I am loosely grouping together here) of what is colloquially called "torture-porn" and of what at least one critic has called director Michael Haneke's "sadomodernism." It is beyond the scope of my research to explore this difference here.

coincidence of two lacerations, in myself and in the other" (8). It is hard to understand what is not political about this work. The reference to "a chink in the armor" reminds the reader that the context of Bataille's ruminations here is war. What must it take for two opposing sides in hostilities to begin to communicate? Beyond this, though, Bataille is pointing to the general conditions for any type of communication, and what he effectively equates communication to is a disease – a communicable disease which passes like an infection between two open wounds, a risk of exposure taken self-consciously.

In "The Body as Meat: Sacrifice's Affect in William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*," I look first at contemporary debates regarding both Burroughs's position as either a modernist or postmodernist and those surrounding *Naked Lunch*'s subversiveness or lack thereof. I argue that the typical critical dismissal of Burroughs's work rests on a misunderstanding of the ugly feelings in his work. Or, rather, "uglier" feelings, as I see these as extending Sianne Ngai's work on the aesthetics of ugly feelings. Burroughs's point in the portrayal of these is to show the manipulability of affect in contemporary control societies. This control of affect rests upon the reduction of the human subject to bare life. The figure of flesh/meat provides a symbolic focal point for many of these concerns, and leads to Burroughs's depiction of the heterogeneous body. The power of this depiction is magnified by Burroughs's refusal to work sensation up into emotion, and instead to leave it at the level of affect, which is reinforced by the nonlinearity of his writing.

In my chapter "The Living Thesis: *Dhalgren*, the Heterogeneous Body, and the Formation of Sacred Community," I look at how Samuel Delany's novel engages the idea of the heterogeneous body to explore alternative models of community. I begin by

looking at the novel's rupturing of the world into the profane and sacred, which is accomplished through both the narrative events and the linguistic departure into the experimental. The sacred world is neither a utopia nor a dystopia, but corresponds to Foucault's notion of a heterotopia, one in this case populated by subjects possessed of heterogeneous bodies. Delany's novel begins to answer the question of what life within such a population is like and how a community may then be formed. My analysis of his answer to this will lead me into a deeper consideration of Esposito's immunitarian paradigm. Delany's novel, as I hope to show, contravenes this historical community model to offer a community model based on something like an affirmative biopolitics.

My final chapter, "At the Frontiers of Art and Science: Taboo and Transgression in Bioart," considers the way in which the contemporary art practice of bioart responds to the ideological effects of the life sciences. The life sciences support the biopolitical state by promulgating an idea of the human as a fully comprehensible object of scientific knowledge: in order to understand the human, one only need study its material substrate. I look at the long history of critique of the life sciences first and then turn to bioart itself. Bioart is not uniform in its approach to the life sciences: there is a division between bioart which augments the authority of the life sciences and bioart which seeks to critique their mystification. The former, which I call fetishistic bioart, elicits a sense of fascination with the power of the biological sciences, while the latter, or sacred bioart, achieves a demystifying effect. It does so in two ways: the first involves a transgressive juxtaposition of the scientific body with the domestic body; the second uses the most advanced technology to enlarge the capacities of the human body, and in the process,

attempts to create a new set of ritual practices which eradicate the very real, physical boundaries between Self and Other.

CHAPTER 2

THE BODY AS MEAT: SACRIFICE'S AFFECT IN WILLIAM BURROUGHS'S *NAKED LUNCH*

In the first few pages of *And the Hippos Were Boiled in Their Tanks*, an early novel co-written by Jack Kerouac and William Burroughs and published only in 2008 which is based on Lucian Carr's murder of David Kammerer, a character named Phillip expounds upon his philosophy of life to Will Dennison, Burroughs's stand-in in the novel. Phillip claims, "I've figured out a whole philosophy on the idea of waste as evil and creation as good. So long as you are creating something it is good. The only sin is waste of your potentialities" (5). Dennison observes that "That sounded pretty silly to me," and later asks, "Yeah, but what are your criteria to tell waste from creation?" There is in this early piece the first suggestion of a Burroughsian aesthetics, one which calls to mind the Bataillean notion of nonproductive expenditure. Creation that is productive maintains the status quo to conserve and to consume rationally. Instead, Burroughs would seem to be suggesting that what is "other," what is seen as waste, can have some value and, if we extrapolate from the statement by using Bataille to help clarify Burroughs's problem, that only by embracing such wasteful endeavors can humans ever live at the "summit." This philosophy of waste is present in Burroughs's other works, but is more visible here than in his later novels, due largely to Burroughs's lack of technical skill, such as his clumsy editorializing. The idea of life at the summit is expressed several times in the novel, although often only negatively, as the character of Dennison decries the limited, cautious lives of those around him. When speaking of Phil's dying mother, he remarks that she "was resisting death as she had resisted life, frozen with resentment of

process and change" (57). And when discussing another character's fixation on Phil, he says, "So you want to wait. Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow – waiting till you're dead," and proceeds to characterize the amorous fixation as similar to a prosperity which is "always just around the corner, but never here and now" (27). The rejection of transcendence and the emphasis on immanent relations, the scorn for rational consumption with its eye toward the future and for someone who resists both life and death – all of these positions are in alignment with a Bataillean philosophy.

Of course, this borders on cliché. It is also a wholly negative formation. It must be the frisson (the cold chills, thrills, intense excitement, and shudders), the *affect*, accompanying the reading of Burroughs's work which offers the alternative. I believe that disruptive affect is the defining feature of Burroughs's novel *Naked Lunch* and I will argue that it operates through two separate processes, one occurring on the level of content and one occurring on the level of form. These two processes correspond to what may be seen as two different theoretical lineages of affect: one, perhaps the more prominent of the two in today's critical theory, descending from Silvan Tomkins to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Paolo Virno to theorists like Sianne Ngai, and the other from Spinoza to Deleuze to contemporary theorists like Brian Massumi, a split that can be characterized, at least in part, on whether affect is seen to be synonymous with emotion or distinct from it. I hope to examine *Naked Lunch* in light of these two traditions, and to synthesize them through my efforts to establish a general economy of taste.

Any discussion of Burroughs's writing must immediately confront its two most salient features: its scatology and its formal experimentation. I offer that both of these features derive from an aesthetics of general economy present in his texts. Critics usually

discuss the scatology and formal experimentation separately – at most, they might give a vague nod to the interrelation of the two, but generally they do not explore in depth their connection to one another, and these two areas of concern are typically the cornerstones of the attempts to periodize Burroughs's work. While I do not want to belabor the issue of whether Burroughs was a modernist or postmodernist, a brief summary of the debate will highlight the contours of the general critical approach to his writing.

Considering the literary context of the time, Burroughs's aesthetic is certainly not unprecedented: the modernist classics like *Ulysses*, *The Sound and the Fury*, the *U.S.A.* trilogy, among others, all featured formal experimentation and authors like Henry Miller and Norman Mailer were nearly as infamous for their scatological references as Burroughs would be. And like the modernists and postmodernists, Burroughs was skeptical of what Lyotard has called humanity's "grand narratives," such as religion, Marxism, and scientific progress. However, Burroughs objected to what he saw as the modernist project's replacement of the lost values of civilization with aesthetics via a rigidly exercised control over form (control, for Burroughs, is one of the most dangerous addictions, a theme which is given a central role in *Naked Lunch*). In this project the author is the controller of form, obsessively reworking, or predetermining, the form of their works. Even Burroughs's Beat contemporaries fell prey to this addiction, and *Naked Lunch* served as a thematic and formal counterpoint to their spontaneous romanticism, as in the difference between Kerouac's method of the long scroll as a manifestation of ego and Burroughs's lifelong commitment to collaborative art – not just his writing, but also the numerous films and paintings he co-created.

Beyond his commitment to collaboration, Burroughs also sought to relinquish authorial control through an aesthetics that engaged with, as near as it could, anti-form or formal discontinuity. As he said of his work, "I have no control over what I write, which is as it should be" (*Letters* 289). The apocryphal account of the printing of *Naked Lunch* holds that the routines in the novel were simply sent to the press in the order in which they were typed up. While the account has its origins in truth, it is most often deployed as a lightly-veiled criticism against Burroughs's artistic abilities by suggesting that his works are entirely the result of contingency and chance. Contrary to his own assertions, Burroughs did, in fact, exert control over his work, but it is the process and struggle which become important, and too the way in which his work provides what may be called a negative asymptote of the authorial role, always approaching the negative limits of Barthes' death of the author, though here from the side of production rather than reception. Burroughs's specific formal experiments with the cut-ups have their precursors in Dadaist and Surrealist aesthetic play such as collages and exquisite corpse, and today the innumerable descendants of this lineage include music sampling and video mash-ups.

That Burroughs is frequently cited as an influence on contemporary popular artists and that he maintains to this day a certain cult status is without question. However, it seems that *Naked Lunch* carries the burden of its own legend of transgression. Even in the anthology published to commemorate the work's publication, Naked Lunch @ *50: Anniversary Essays*, critics cannot come to a consensus regarding the subversiveness of the novel – though given the number of them who take the question as the start of their respective inquiries, at the very least one can agree that it is hardly a dead issue. In fact, these critics often take diametrically opposed positions regarding the

novel. It is instructive to consider a few exemplary arguments offered therein. Loren Glass, in "Still Dirty after all These Years: The Continuing Trials of *Naked Lunch*," argues against the subversiveness of the novel and claims "Burroughs owes his success to the structural transformations of capitalism in the contemporary era, and that his aesthetic innovations actually helped contribute to these transformations as they have been articulated in the global culture industry, which is increasingly friendly to radical aesthetic experimentation." While certainly there is a portion of cultural criticism which sees aesthetic experimentation as increasingly co-opted by the culture industry, the matter is hardly settled. Even more problematic is Glass's assertion that not only was Burroughs's success aided by capitalism's structural transformations but that he "helped to contribute to these transformations." This is, I believe, a tall order Glass has set for himself. It is one thing to claim a work is not subversive enough, and quite another to prove that it helped capitalism along.

Unsurprisingly, Glass's evidence seems to prove a different point than what he originally intended. While he is correct that various promotions of *Naked Lunch* capitalized upon its censorship trials, his larger point seems to be that the rulings of both *Naked Lunch*'s obscenity trial – and, before it, *Ulysses*'s obscenity trial – set the stage for a reliance upon authorial intention (in the *Ulysses* trial) and then later upon a group of experts on literature (in the *Naked Lunch* trial), who were needed to prove the work's artistic merit, thereby creating, according to Glass, a "bureaucracy" of literary experts. Ah, the feared bureaucracy of literary experts – presumably this is an aspect of the structural transformations brought about by *Naked Lunch*. While economic commentators such as David Harvey have decried the "rule of experts" or technofascism as a hallmark

of contemporary power, I am not convinced these commentators are pointing their fingers at literary experts. Even if one were to take this seriously, the target of Glass's vituperations seems misplaced. Are we to hold responsible a work for the legal decisions which are based upon it? Does this truly prove the failure of *Naked Lunch*'s subversiveness? Though Glass's criticism is maybe stronger than others', nevertheless it is representative of a rather prosaic and, I would warrant, ultimately reactionary type of criticism of not just *Naked Lunch* but other literature deemed "transgressive" which wants material evidence of transgression – wants, it seems, nothing short of the starting an actual revolution in order to verify a work's subversiveness.

In another attempt to rectify supposed misinterpretations of The Talking Asshole routine, Glass reviews Timothy Murphy's take on Burroughs's famous distinction between bureaus and cooperatives. But, he notes, in the letter to Ginsberg in which this routine originally appears, Burroughs used the term corporation vs. cooperative. Glass, somewhat problematically, I think, calls this a slippage and feels it confirms Oliver Harris's point that "complicity in all he opposes" is the hallmark of Burroughs's work. The most obvious objection one can make to this critique is that such genetic research can be limited in its usefulness. Beyond that, though, Glass neglects the historical ambivalence of the term "corporation" which Alan Trachtenburg has discussed in *The Incorporation of America*. Trachtenburg notes that originally a "corporate charter was a privilege to be granted only by a special act of a state legislature, and then for purposes clearly in the public interest" (6). What is more, while Glass says the slippage indicates "the dialectical difficulties of distinguishing modes of collectivity and corporeality under global capitalism," he is using the term "corporeality" in its pejorative, private-enterprise

sense. Instead, it seems that it might have been this "corporeal" root of corporation that led Burroughs to choose the term in the first place, only reluctantly giving this sense up for the more politically appropriate "cooperative."

If the arguments against the radical nature of *Naked Lunch* seem weak, often the arguments in support of its subversiveness feel incomplete. Theophile Aries and Davis Schneiderman, to take just two representative authors from the 50th-annversary anthology, offer views of the novel which are diametrically opposed to Glass's. Aries's piece, "Burroughs' Visionary Lunch," contends that Burroughs was a visionary who predicted the contemporary world in which "the need for control knows no limits" (201). But aside from a brief mention of "modern security measures," he does not develop this idea in any depth. His most provocative statement, that "*Naked Lunch* describes a world where criminality has evolved from 'doing' to 'being,'" has resonances with critiques of biopolitics and the notion of bare life, but he fails to appreciate the implications of this for radical politics when he takes literally Burroughs's contention that the novel is a "how-to book" for our dystopian present. I hope to return to this statement later in order to demonstrate that it is, for a number of reasons, one of Burroughs's many ironic claims, one that elides the true intention of a proposal for radical "being."

Schneiderman's critique of the novel in "'Gentlemen I will slop a pearl': The (Non)Meaning of *Naked Lunch*" is much closer to my own – close enough to employ Bataille as well. Schneiderman, who also co-edited the superb anthology of essays on Burroughs entitled *Retaking the Universe: William S. Burroughs in the Age of Globalization*, notes that the most interesting new field of Burroughs studies, given the collaborative nature of his works, is that of textual/genetic studies. However, he himself

is not a textual scholar. Instead, he uses Oliver Harris's general point that the novel cannot be considered a novel proper due to its barely submerged epistolary roots to then hypothesize that "if the texts in *Naked Lunch* are not the texts of a "novel" in any sense of a form arrived at prior to its construction (and, rather, elements of letters), the treatment of the text-as-such results in a series of *impossible* readings, each attempting mastery foiled by the material methodological limits" (189). This sounds very Bataillean, and it is thus unsurprising when, on the next page, Schneiderman distinguishes between readings of *Naked Lunch*'s "excessive production" which follow either a Freudian/Surrealist model in which the irrational elements of the novel may be brought into the rational world in order to transform it or a Bataillean model in which the subject is brought up against her own limitations. However, while Schneiderman's thesis is a strong one, he himself points to one of its limitations (without characterizing it as such): that the Bataillean transgression enabled by the novel in this reading does not "reveal the means of escape" but only "the shackles one already wears" (190). While Aries's recommendation to read *Naked Lunch* as a "how-to book" is maybe too simplistic, surely we can hope for more from the novel than a spotlight on our own imprisonment. The other problem is that Schneiderman primarily uses his claim to refute common meaningful interpretations of the novel. The limitations to this wholly negative critical practice are much similar to the limitations of the model of transgression he proposes.

According to Schneiderman, readings of *Naked Lunch* based upon a novelistic or narratological understanding are doomed to failure. Schneiderman is correct…to a degree. These readings are strained when they depend upon a narrative which arouses emotion. However, I would argue that they are still generative, still productive, and not

simply negative, insofar as they produce affect through non-narrative readings. I hope to show that this not only rescues Burroughs, but also Bataille, from the limitations of the deconstructionist critique. As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, theoretical work on affect can be roughly divided into that which views affect as synonymous with emotion (and, as we will see, with a number of consequent identificatory positions) and that which views it as distinct from emotion, connected rather to pre-emotional, processual becomings. I would like to begin my analysis of affect by reviewing the former theoretical approach to affect, as application of this to Burroughs's work will hopefully generate a defense against criticisms of Burroughs as amoral and apolitical.

In *Ugly Feelings*, Sianne Ngai states that she wants to expand the range of aesthetic emotions in our encounters with artworks to include "ugly feelings," such as paranoia, envy, or jealousy.[v] These feelings, according to Ngai, arise out of a sense of obstructed agency; thus she connects emotions with politics (capacity for agency) and paves the way for examining each ugly feeling within its cultural context as an "affective ideologeme" (7). She argues that she does not want to reduce such feelings to ressentiment nor to pose them as solutions particularly, but suggests that such feelings, both through their representations and their evocations in reception, can be *new* "models of subjectivity, collectivity, and agency" (5) – although generally Ngai's analysis focuses more on representation than reception (in contrast to other affect theorists such as Massumi, who equally concerned with both).

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[v] . Ngai uses the term "feelings" in her discussion of affect, but to those affect theorists who distinguish between emotions and feelings, what she is effectively considering are emotions. Until I begin my discussion of those theorists who distinguish between the two, I will use the terms interchangeably as Ngai acknowledges she is doing (27).

These ugly feelings occasion particular manifestations of the subjective/objective problematic, which she outlines roughly as follows: in feelings such as paranoia, envy, and jealousy, there is an unresolved ambiguity regarding the feeling's subjective or objective status; they participate in a dialectic between inside and outside; consequently, there is a tension between psychological interiors and bodily exteriors (21). Later in her work she considers for example, the way the animation of the claymotion show *The PJs*, featuring African-American characters, takes the racialized marker of animatedness and presents it subversively as the hyper-animatedness of the characters threatens their bodily contours, thus "remind[ing] us that there can be ways of inhabiting a social role that actually distort its boundaries" (117); later she looks at modernist poetry's technique of employing excessive concatenation of details, thereby producing a feeling of "stuplimity," which Ngai argues works to effect resistance against systems of control. Ngai's work is novel in its goal of expanding the aesthetic's repertoire of emotions to include those beyond a sense of the beautiful or the sublime and in its connection between emotions and politics. Her claims open a space for a consideration of Burroughs's writing in terms of affect; indeed, his writing appears to extend Ngai's analysis, taking up the theme of ugly feelings at the point where her analysis leaves off.

Ngai examines ugly feelings in artworks, whereas Burroughs's literature might be said to feature and generate *uglier* feelings. While the feelings Ngai considers still retain something of the noble, something of the tragic about them - they are, after all, intimately connected to the sense of obstructed agency – the same cannot be said of the feelings that predominate in Burroughs's work: humor, disgust and revulsion, perverse titillation. Using the terms of Ngai's own argument, in contrast to the feelings she looks at often the

ugly feelings present in Burroughs's literature rest upon a basis of horror at one's own complicity in suppressing the agency of others. (However, as I will show, even one's horror at the oppression of the Other is always undercut in Burroughs' because however much horror you feel, you are always oppressed, too, in more ways than you can count.) Unfortunately, many critics do not appreciate the horrified aspect of Burroughs's literature. Instead, these critics focus on a specific set of represented power-dynamics, without considering the full range of affect that is also conveyed – not to mention, their analyses imply that literature should be evaluated by its effectiveness at portraying what *should* be rather than what *is*. Their dismissals of the relevance to social action of Burroughs's work rest upon one of two bases: they either argue that Burroughs is apolitical or that he is amoral (and this amorality is predicated on the representation of uglier feelings). Burroughs *himself* – while both judgments are purportedly grounded in Burroughs's art, upon closer inspection, we frequently discover that, in fact, they are dependent upon opinions of the man…and even these opinions often are uninformed, as the critics find their evidence in the mythos surrounding Burroughs or grossly misrepresent Burroughs by taking his writings, particularly his letters, out of context. Erik Mortenson, in *Capturing the Beat Moment: Cultural Politics and the Poetics of Presence*, combining an aesthetic criticism and a political one, argues that Burroughs's work is "totalizing" and dependedent upon an "exclusionary practice that limited access to his project," an "othering that creates scapegoats and marginalized groups" (182). In Bill Morgan's *The Typewriter is Holy*, claims Burroughs, "remained aloof to politics and seemed to reject every suggestion that he take action" though Morgan does acknowledge a political cast to Burroughs's novel, or at least a greater degree of radical political

awareness than Kerouac's conservatism (193). Todd F. Tietchen, in *The Cubalogues: Beat Writers in Revolutionary Havana*, proffers the most damning condemnation of Burroughs, decrying his and Kerouac's "predatory treatment of Latin America…where characters routinely participate in forms of ethnic/racial tourism" (9). What these critics miss is the complex set of affects which are both depicted and evoked in Burroughs's novels. Contrary to the popular opinion of Burroughs as a misogynistic, paternalistic American bigot at play in the world, an opinion of the man that is extended to his literature, he is, in fact, the post-colonial writer par excellence – it is an unflinchingly honest portrayal of the *ugliness* of the colonial situation[vi].

Contra these critics, I would argue that Burroughs's work is eminently political. The "uglier feelings" present in Burroughs's work often repel readers, but what we might accept or even attempt to embrace is Burroughs's construction of affective energies through these uglier feelings, what Charles Altieri, in his recent work *The Particulars of Rapture: An Aesthetics of the Affects*, has called the "incommensurable positions" of affective states and the range of values that may be contained within them. Like Ngai, Altieri analyzes affective states which are neglected or rejected; however, Ngai holds that this is a result of their unseemliness, whereas Altieri suggests that the inattention persists because these affects are not "full-scale dramatic emotions," but "fluid moments that often also serve as fundamental elements within these emotions" (44). Altieri goes on to argue that modern philosophy's explanations of affects usually subordinate affects to

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[vi] It maybe bears mentioning that the same inattention to the particulars of affect which hinder critical assessments of Burroughs's writing is also one of the factors at work in his sustained cult popularity, as well as an identification with a mythical persona constructed around Burroughs himself, something critic Oliver Harris examines in his book *William Burroughs and The Secret of Fascination*.

beliefs and action. Those other affective states, replete with values and energies incommensurable with one another, are not oriented towards belief and action – or are not oriented towards them in the same way – and consequently they are dismissed by philosophy. The cognitivist position's version of this selective blindness relies upon seeing affective agency as "a process of seeking cognitive stability in relation to disruption or surprise" (25).

In contrast, Altieri argues that an aesthetic orientation will show how "we find satisfaction within the very modes of participation that consciousness allows and expands" – disruption or surprise or irresolvability thus becomes productive. Literature allows individuals "to express what is involved in their particular way of constructing values." (26), a valuable enterprise in spite of (or because of?) the necessity that we "adapt ourselves to the right to do just that, even if we are dissatisfied with the results." The expansion generated by literature is rooted in the identificatory potentials generated by literature's represented affective states, which challenge the coherency of identification and allow for a "focus on multiple identities that taken together constitute a life" (138).

Altieri's theorization of affect resonates with the Bataillean *impossible*. For one, Altieri's suggestion that affect has been neglected by philosophy in favor of action and belief is suggested obliquely by a passage in Bataille which connects the privileging of action as a means to avoid the impossible: "Action as a palliative for the pain which leads away from dramatization and the extreme limit of the impossible" (*Inner Experience* 10). The impossible takes many forms in Bataille's body of work, but in *L'Impossible* he formulates the impossible as a position of extreme contradiction, much like what both

Altieri and Ngai suggest is one of the strengths of affective experience. Bataille suggests that humanity is faced with two perspectives – that of the scientific and the useful, which possess power over us because of their right to truth; or pain, horror, and extreme passion, the impossible, "to which we accede only by forgetting the truth of all these rights, only by accepting [death's] disappearance" (17). Death's disappearance could be interpreted loosely as our finding a means to live on symbolically; but I believe Bataille means we learn to accept the disappearance of the individual which death brings about. Thus we reach the impossible limit by accepting what is unacceptable – death – and we accomplish this acceptance, paradoxically or impossibly, through our pain, horror, and passion.

Though Altieri describes the expansion of modes of consciousness offered through affect generated by the aesthetic as a type of "satisfaction," this is, to my ears, too pleasant a term for what Bataille suggests and what, as I hope to show, Bataille's work offers. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*, especially, presents a wide cross-section of the affective range, including those values that the critical tradition often fails to appreciate – which, too, we often submerge in our daily existence – and presents this cross-section's immediate, contradictory nature.

To begin, there is ample evidence that Burroughs is explicitly engaging the idea of affect within the text of *Naked Lunch*. In the opening scene, the narrator William Lee, puts on a "B-production" for an "exec type fruit," a "square" clearly modeled on the iconic man in the gray flannel suit, by escaping a cop (3). He then engages the man in conversation and compliments him, saying, "Thanks, kid. I can see you're one of our own" (4), and the square's face "lights up like a pinball machine, with stupid, pink

affect." The pink affect of the square and its association with the arcades of an idyllic childhood, evokes the pure, cherubic innocence of the world of fifties conformity Lee is barred from (a world we only get a glimpse of before William Lee literally descends into the subterranean and subaltern). The contrast between this man's world and Lee's is further reinforced by Lee's gesture of intimacy when, as he says, "I drew closer and put my dirty junky fingers on his sharkskin sleeve." The dirty fingers contaminate the scrubbed pink affect of the man, who is "young, good-looking, crew cut."

His declaration of camaraderie and gesture of intimacy are ironic, not only because the square is undoubtedly not a member of the subaltern world Lee inhabits and will eventually be tricked by Lee in a "catnip" con (a substitution of catnip for marijuana), but because he is offering the square an identificatory promise which is precisely the principle that the world of fifties conformity is founded upon – that obsessive need to belong to a group, be considered "one of our own." Moreover, if the normative world of the square is possessed of a homogeneity of affect, from the perspective of the square Lee's world holds forth the possibility of multiple affects and identities. It is a floating signifier, a marker for what is outside the ken of the square's normative world.

However, within that world such identifications are fleeting, problematic, and often outright antagonistic: Lee illustrates that "there's no honor among thieves" through his ensuing anecdote to the square about an underworld character called "The Vigilante," who turned a gun on his confederates and killed six of them. Of course, we cannot discount the possibility that Lee's anecdote about the Vigilante is just another B-production meant to shock the square (and the reader). But even granted that intent, it

also manifests a core truth about the Beat Inferno Burroughs describes, one which the square's romantic notions do not allow for.

The pure, unadulterated affect of the square can be contrasted with a number of other instances in the text of characters who lack affect entirely. The affectlessness of the characters within the subterranean and subaltern world to which William Lee travels is symbolic of the sense of the nullity at the heart of that world. There is the junky Iris, a project of Doctor Benway's, the mad scientist of the novel. Iris takes shots every fifteen minutes, and the "needles rust in her dry flesh, which, here and there, has grown completely over a joint to form a smooth green brown wen." Iris periodically makes "flat, factual statement[s] relative to her own person." As with Lee's dirty junky fingers, affect and flesh are loosely associated with one another: here the smoothness of the cysts corresponds to the flatness of the junkie's affect, an affectlessness which is exhibited in relation to herself, a loss of the most primary of affects.

Then there is Sailor, who has "dead, cold, undersea eyes, eyes without a trace of warmth or lust or hate or any feeling" (43). In a repetition of the early scene between Lee and the square, Sailor and a shoe shine boy have a moment: "The Sailor leaned forward and put a finger on the boy's inner arm at the elbow. He spoke in his dead, junky whisper." At first read, the Sailor is a phantasmatic projection of Lee and the shoe shine boy a stand-in for the square. Whose projection, exactly, is left uncertain – is this how Lee imagines the square sees him? or is this what Lee fears he will become? But this scene also uncovers a hidden dynamic of the first iteration of it, which is the implicit sexual predation of the "exec type *fruit*" on members of the lower class – and thus it is the square who is the Sailor and Lee who is the shoe shine boy. Through this reading,

we see how Lee's subjectivity incorporates identifications with both predator and prey, subject and object. Moreover, whereas the earlier scene was a transmission of affect, the encounter between two different types of affect, here the scene is chilling because the touch conveys no feeling at all.

Pure affect and affectlessness constitute two opposite poles on the spectrum of affect which is represented in the novel. In fact, though, these two affective positions demonstrate the same principle: it is the manipulability of affect which they both suggest that I believe is at the heart of Burroughs's concern with affect in the novel. William Lee easily elicits affect from the square, an operation which proceeds according to the mechanics of a pinball machine, while, correspondingly, Doctor Benway makes Iris a project of his, testing affect's autonomy, or lack thereof. These examples show just how beyond our control our own affect is – there is excess in all directions. (And in an age when the great ideological con job seems to be convincing people that our sources of unhappiness are internal and can be manipulated, rather than external, is this not a political point?) In some sense, then, the text's own production of affect is yet another con job meant to fool or manipulate the audience, and, paradoxically, is also an attempt to produce a certain liberation of affect. Through its staging of nauseating scenes of sex, death, and sacrifice, and its use of grotesque metaphors, the novel evokes the most extreme of affects.

This dual-purpose of Burroughs's – to highlight the manipulability of affect while also engineering a liberation of affect – is political when viewed within the contemporary context of what is referred to by both Deleuze and Foucault as societies of control. Timothy Murphy has explored Burroughs's novels' through a Deleuzian framework and

a number of other critics have pointed out the significance Burroughs had for two concepts that have been foundational to modern theory, the body without organs and societies of control. Deleuze and Guattari saw Burrough's work as the unparalleled exemplification of the body without organs, while Deleuze and Foucault both acknowledged Burroughs's coining of "control systems" as the root of societies of control. But it is somewhat surprising, given Deleuze's additional interest in affect, that no critic has attempted to examine the interplay of these three concepts – societies of control, the body without organs, and affect – within Burroughs's work. These Deleuzian concepts, however, bear a number of striking similarities to Bataille's theorizations of restricted economy and general economy; although Bataille's philosophy proves more useful in interpreting Burroughs's work.

In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari state that the socius has always tried to codify, regulate, and channel the flows of desire. Capitalism, in its efforts to liberate desire for its own purposes, attempts to deterritorialize these flows. (In Bataillean terms, this could be understood as the attempt by restricted economy to utilize general economy, an impossible proposition as general economy is that which defies instrumentalization.) As capitalism approaches the resultant schizophrenic limit, it creates, according to Deleuze and Guattari, the body without organs. Nevertheless, the approach is checked by an inhibitory tendency, which leads to the reinstitution of residual and artificial territorialities. The flows of desire are neither natural nor liberated (though they never truly have been); they have been overlaid with remnants of historical processes and forms, then bricolaged with innumerable capitalistic imperatives.

The world depicted in *Naked Lunch* is the archetypal society of control. Among the innumerable early plans for the novel was one which lays bare Burroughs's interest in exploring the idea. In a letter to Allen Ginsberg, dated Feb 19th, 1955, Burroughs writes:

> "The novel is taking shape. Something even more evil than atomic destruction is the theme – namely an anti-dream drug which destroys the symbolizing, myth-making intuitive, empathizing, telepathic faculty in man, so that his behavior can be controlled and predicted by the scientific methods that have proved so useful in the physical sciences. In short this drug eliminates the disturbing factor of spontaneous, unpredictable life from the human equation." (268).

Of course, the erasure of the topoi of atomic destruction was nearly complete, with only a few odd references lingering on. But the theme of control remains, although in typical Burroughsian fashion, the intended central plot device of the anti-dream drug which would have leant the narrative focus and cohesion has been abandoned and the sources of control have been dispersed, spread across the social system. The beginning of the novel, in which the part-time narrator William Lee encounters a businessman in the subway as Lee is fleeing the police – a conjunction of the realms of the straight, the criminal, and the law – offers a representation of the schizophrenic field constituted by contemporary capitalism. The businessman's persona is entirely constructed from the consumer signifiers he sports: "the Florida tan, the two hundred dollar sharkskin suit, the button-down Brooks Brothers shirt and carrying *The News* as a prop" (3). But even more tellingly, although he is presented as the "normal" individual in the scene, he is actually a repressed homosexual, thus conforming to the norms of society, who desires that his

interaction with Lee follow the script of the "B-productions," which are the entertainment of the masses. The world within which William Lee moves around is one which operates according to the logic of capitalist imperatives and scripted according to the territorializing flows of mass media, made all the more obvious by the disparity in class status.

As Lee flees from the police and the threat of prosecution in the courts, his escape gains momentum, and he passes out of the subway, beyond the city limits of New York City, across America, into Mexico, then Tangier – and finally into the hallucinatory landscape of Interzone. On the way, Lee is privileged with an encompassing perspective on America, a cultural bird's eye view. The "Interior" of America is "a vast subdivision, antennae of television to the meaningless sky," a double metonymic substitution for fists raised towards heaven, which consequently empties out the idea of god and human passion (11). The houses attached to the antennae are "lifeproof"; only the young bring in a little vitality and that is soon sloughed off. There is a drag in America, says Lee, and "there is no drag like U.S. drag." The source of the drag is undetectable, but its effects are not – it builds habits. Habits are nothing more than means of control, however limited, and governments, political parties, media outlets, individuals – the entire spectrum of society – is vulnerable to control, both as source and as object.

Lee passes through the various geographic localities to his final destination and moves from a 1950's America which corresponds to the Deleuzian conception of schizophrenic capitalistic society to the dreamscape territory of Interzone which is more like the society at the threshold, the asymptote only an infinitesimal percentage of a degree away from zero of madness. In his essay, "Postscript on Societies of Control" (a

somewhat more accessible version of his discussion of Foucault in "What is a Dispositif?"), Deleuze describes the historical evolution of society, as this history appears in fragmented form in Foucault's work, from societies of sovereignty to disciplinary societies to societies of control. Fragments of disciplinary societies persist only insofar as they are still paving the way for the new form of societies, and Deleuze explicitly references Burroughs in regards to the new form, "'Control' is the name Burroughs proposes as a term for the new monster" (3). Control is about "limitless postponements," in which one is never finished with anything. It is "infinite." Disciplinary society and its mechanisms depended on enclosed environments and a regularization of the law. In contrast, the mechanisms of control, no longer science fiction, can give "the position of any element within an open environment at any given instant," and as one judge says to another, "Be just, and if you can't be just, be arbitrary" (5). In Interzone, disciplinary society has been swept away entirely, replaced by a control society. There are no boundaries or limits to the control mechanisms in Interzone. An individual does not have to be in a certain place or have committed a transgression in order for control to be exerted upon him or her. Control is all-pervasive, disruptive, and all of the orders of violence are contained within one's own head.

The forms of control, too, just like the practitioners and victims, are multifarious. But in the novel, we see one of the more pernicious forms of contemporary control mechanisms, that which is exerted upon the body, such as what a speaker at a conference in the novel defines as "control of physical movement, mental processes, emotional reactions and apparent sensory impressions by means of bioelectric signals injected into

the nervous system of the subject" (136). This corresponds to what, accomplished today through more sophisticated technology, would now be called neuromanipulation.

When we first meet Doctor Benway[vii], he has been called as an advisor to the very hygienic and seemingly happy "Freeland Republic." Is the name code for America? And who has called him in? As is typical with the narration, the passive construction leaves hidden the man behind the curtain – if there even is such an individual. Regardless of the identity of his employer, his purpose is clear – controlling the subjects of Freeland. At his former position in the country Annexia, Benway gained practice at implementing a policy of what he calls T.D., or total demoralization. The implementation of the method of total demoralization is analogous to the transition from a society based on discipline and punishment to one based on control. In Annexia, Benway banned outright punishment such as concentration camps, mass arrest and torture because, as he says, "I deplore brutality" (19). He does not deplore it due to ethical objections, of course, but because "it's not efficient" and because it "locates the opponent and mobilizes resistance." Instead, he emphasizes control through feelings of guilt and anxiety...the subject "must be made to feel that he deserves *any* treatment he receives because there is something (never specified) horribly wrong with him" (19). What Benway produces are

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[vii] I have yet to encounter an explanation of the humorous – and telling – allusions contained within Benway's name. There is, for one, the play on "been gay," obtainable through a substitution of a single letter, which suggests that Benway's psychopathy might have its origins in the repression of a homosexual identity. Then there is the additional allusion to "Bengay," the heat rub invented in 1898, which with its connection to salves, balms, and etc., reinforces the idea of Dr. Benway as a manipulative quack; and the heat rub's use in what by 1950's normative standards would appear to be perverse sexual practices is in accordance with the novel's exploration of the underworld.

citizens who are control-addicts – not in the sense that they need to control others (though there are those in Interzone, too), but that they need to be controlled.

The numerous political parties of Interzone are also organized along a spectrum of control. This is not the modern American political spectrum which proceeds from left to right with a strong belief in individual autonomy to a belief in social responsibility and collective welfare, but instead represents a range of beliefs based upon various means of the power of one group or individual to influence or merge with another. (But then maybe the former spectrum of political positions is not after all that different from the latter…?) This is not a difference of degrees of control or of desire to control; the salient difference is the means by which the parties control individuals: the Liquefactionists simply get rid of those who oppose them; the Divisionists endlessly replicate themselves until they overpower through sheer number; and the Senders occupy the thoughts of their opponents and their adherents. All of these political parties, however, seem otherwise empty of content, possessing no real political beliefs beyond the belief that they should be in power (again, could the analogues to contemporary politics be any clearer?). It is as if their need to control has begun to control them.

We see, then, that the irony of control as it is presented in the novel is that control invariably turns against the one who hopes to use it. This is shown most obviously through the example of the fictional Latahs, who are either a religious sect or a group with a mental disorder. The Latahs make a number of oblique appearances in the novel. Latahs *uncontrollably* imitate others' actions. If a person waves his hand, a nearby Latah will feel a compulsion to wave his own hand. In addition to their lack of agency, they appear to have no thoughts or desires of their own, only serving as a reflecting surface for

the actions of others. This would seem to make a Latah the ultimate controllable subject, as a Party Leader in the novel believes. His plan is to import Latahs for a riot because then all that will be needed is "one riot leader for the whole unit" (118). The Party Leader, however, is proven to be a fool as the rioters quickly become a mob imitating whatever is nearest to them, killing a drunk, and swiftly stopped by the police.

But their inherently uncontrollable nature is not the only danger posed by the Latahs. As another character illustrates through an anecdote about an affair with a Latah, attempts to use Latahs contain a hidden threat to the controller's persona: "The Latah imitates all his expressions and mannerisms and simply sucks all the persona out of him like a sinister ventriloquist's dummy." The hidden logic of a Latah's compulsive behavior is that attempts to control a Latah will eviscerate one's own personality – one will become full of the actions meant for imitation and whatever essence of one's own being once existed will be replaced by these pre-movements. The controller becomes what he had hoped to control. Or maybe it would be more appropriate to say that the controller becomes *enviscerated*, that is, nothing more than the meat puppet he had hoped to control. In Interzone, intersubjective relations have become entirely perverted, understood only in the sense of the potentially useful and controllable. If, as Bataille notes in a number of places, the activity of thought reduces its objects to things and we long for the restoration of the continuous, intimate order, here in the Interzone, that longing is absent, objectification is the rule, and the return to the subject is his enslavement or dehumanization.

In fact, in the novel, control is shown to be effectively useless. As the speaker at the conference on biocontrol, whom I mentioned previously, notes: "You see control can

never be a means to any practical end…It can never be a means to anything but more control" (137). This description of control's addictive and self-additive characteristic, which exists despite its utter futility, can be applied to all depictions of control within the novel. What Burroughs is depicting is the truth of the world of restricted economy, which is the utter madness that lies under the surface of its seeming rationality.

This relation of surface rationality covering a repressed madness is exemplified through the depiction of bureaucracy in the novel. Benway's techniques, as well as many of the other control mechanisms, rely upon the workings of that much-loved contemporary institution of bureaucracy. Like something out of a 19th-century Russian novel (or like the bureaucracy depicted in Spanish writer Benito Perez-Galdos's novel *Miau*, whose workings are so obtuse it cannot even grant a death certificate to the family of the dead protagonist), the bureaucracy in Interzone is labyrinthine and nightmarish. Though Deleuze does not specifically mention bureaucracy when discussing societies of control, and Foucault references it, but abstracts from it, bureaucracy would seem to be a constitutive feature of such a control society. It certainly puts forward the "limitless postponements" mentioned by Deleuze, fostering the sense that one is never finished with anything. It is worth quoting a passage from *Naked Lunch* at length here:

> "Every citizen of Annexia was required to apply for and carry on his person at all times a whole portfolio of documents. Citizens were subject to be stopped in the street at any time…Arrest meant 'provisional detention'; that is, the prisoner would be released if and when his Affidavit of Explanation, properly signed and stamped, was approved by the Assistant Arbiter of Explanations. Since this official hardly ever came

> to his office, and the Affidavit of Explanation had to be presented in person, the explainers spent weeks and months waiting around in unheated offices with no chairs and no toilet facilities.
>
> Documents issued in vanishing ink faded into old pawn tickets. New documents were constantly required. The citizens rushed from one bureau to another in a frenzied attempt to meet impossible deadlines." (19-20)

Torture? Not exactly, although as the passage continues the tactics described push against the boundary of the acceptable. But what I want to highlight is how the above points to the subjective feelings of castration brought about by a bureaucracy which is in collusion with a police state. Through its insistence that the individual is nothing without the necessary papers, that even then there is always the chance that one *might be missing a paper*, and through the infinite postponements of completion, bureaucracy produces a feeling of lack, a true Lacanian *manque*, resulting in a desire for being itself. Deleuze and Guattari note in *Anti-Oedipus* that "Lack is created, planned, and organized in and through social production" (27). It is capitalism and the market economy which most effectively produce such lack, but bureaucracy is capitalism's right hand man, so to speak.

Though Benway disavows brutality and outright torture, many of the tactics he uses, as well as other methods implemented by political parties and so forth, now seem to have a prophetically ambiguous status as torture, given what we have learned about the CIA's tactics in the modern War on Terror. Following the previously quoted passage regarding bureaucracy, the pace of the language quickens and the forcefulness of the tactics increases:

> "All benches were removed from the city, all fountains turned off, all flowers and trees destroyed. Huge electric buzzers on the top of every apartment house (everyone lived in apartments) rang the quarter hour. Often the vibrations would throw people out of bed. Searchlights played over the town all night (no one was permitted to use shades, curtains, shutters or blinds)." (20)

The tactics in the continuation of this passage are of a similar nature. These and the bureaucratic tactics result in life which is never at rest and never allowed even a modicum of privacy.

For Burroughs, bureaucracy and the market society, or capitalistic society, are similar in their circumscription of the human. Bureaucracy (as well as democracy, but Burroughs's inimical feelings towards democracy is a discussion for another day) is like a "cancer" because it turns away from the "human evolutionary direction of infinite potentials and differentiation and independent spontaneous action" (112). Using similar language, Burroughs describes what he alternately calls the Market *or* the Composite City (they appear to be one and the same as the following quotation shows), "the Composite City where all human potentials are spread out in a vast, silent market" (89). There is a tension between these two discussions of human potential. On the one hand, we are given a rare, if somewhat oblique and uncertain, glimpse of Burroughs's optimism, his belief in the infinite potentials of humankind. On the other, we see that that optimism is still undercut by Burroughs's renowned cynicism in that whatever is developed of this potential is immediately plundered for its exchange-value and put on the market.

There is no escape from the logic of the market in this Composite City, nor is there any escape from the surveillance of the police state. There is "not a locked door in the City. Anyone comes into your room at any time" (89). This recalls Deleuze's statement, quoted previously, that contemporary control mechanisms can give "the position of any element within an open environment at any given instant." Of course, it is not only the police who may come into your room, but *anyone*. The absence of locked doors makes clear that the barrier between outside and inside has been eradicated, that whatever is outside may at any time intrude, but Burroughs goes on to note that all houses, of all types, are joined, which forebodingly suggests a world in which there is *no* difference between outside and inside – there is just one, ever-surveilled plane. This reduction corresponds to the withering away of disciplinary society as it's replaced by a control society. Or, as Benway declares in the novel, "A *functioning* police state needs no police" (31).

In addition to this more ominous dimension, the total openness characterizing life in Interzone operates as an exaggeration of the historical progression of privacy as outlined by Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition*. In Arendt's historical account, the modern conception of privacy was arrived at by the Romantics, who were rebelling "against the leveling demands of the social, against what we would call today the conformism inherent in every society" (39). Privacy was thus conceived as a shelter for intimacy from the social's "intrusion upon an innermost region in man which until then had needed no special protection." Arendt's opinion regarding privacy isn't fixed; she does not present it as a universally desirable counterpoint to the social. She is, instead, pointing out that historically privacy has been forced to assume its function of sheltering

intimacy as a consequence of the particular form the social has taken in our society. We could say that in *Naked Lunch*, in which emotions are conspicuously and chillingly absent, this struggle against the intrusion of the social has been lost. Privacy has been obliterated; consequently, the reserves of intimacy have been plumbed and emotions, carefully wrought and fragile, have disappeared. Presumably, these emotions once provided a barrier against the pervasive system of control and now morals are left to modern psychiatry.

Benway provides a figure for reflection upon the role of the medical industry, psychiatry in particular, and science in the construction of the biopolitical subject. These systems of control have transcended the defensive powers of the subject. Benway frequently insists upon the objectivity of science and medicine, as is indicated in his response to an assistant's objections to a surgery they are about to undertake: "Balderdash, my boy…We're scientists…Pure scientists. Disinterested research and damned be him who cries 'Hold, *too much*!'" (110). But as is to be expected, the words issuing from the mad doctor's mouth are not to be trusted. He contradicts himself, giving the lie to the purported disinterestedness of research. In a parody of an operating room scene (which scene occasions a sly switch to dramatic dialogue in the novel, an allusion, I believe, to the historical term "operating theater" and the era of spectacular medicine), Benway predicts, "Soon we'll be operating by remote control on patients we never see…We'll be nothing but button pushers. All the skill is going out of surgery…All the know-how and make-do" (51). Though seemingly a lament on the disappearing human element in medicine, it is not exactly "skill" that Benway wishes to preserve. As he goes on to observe about the operation about to be performed, it was a "pure artistic creation."

The medical industry in which Benway practices has gone just as mad as Benway. Operations are performed which have “absolutely no medical value. No one knows what the purpose of it originally was or if it had a purpose at all” (52). He goes on to describe a typical operation as follows: “in this operation the surgeon deliberately endangers his patient, and then, with incredible speed and celerity, rescues him from death at the last possible split second.” In this, we see that “art for art’s sake” has transformed into “medicine for medicine’s sake”; that is, the purpose of medicine has been lost in the development of an industry which must sustain itself as industry. Medicine, in its enveloping of all human individuals as potential medical subjects, contributes to biopower’s domination as these individuals are always subject to the prerogatives of medicine. Returning to Benway’s prior statement about remote control operations, we might now re-interpret it as a cautionary statement, after all. Though the doctors in the novel seem to have little concern for their patients – it is unclear how the human element represented is positive in any sense – surely there is nothing at all to be gained by the replacement of doctors with machines, not because they lack learned skill but because they will facilitate the routinization of care. In any case, much like the tactics of control in the general public sphere (the removal of park benches, the periodic ringing of buzzers, etc.), these medical interventions ensure the patients/subjects no rest.

Benway's implemented policies in Annexia, whose very name suggests the greedy incorporation of what lies outside its dominion, once they are considered as a whole, depict a society that has been radically reduced to bare life. Compulsory documentation, tactics bordering on torture, total lack of privacy, and incessant medical intervention – life is chained to the state, reduced to its absolute minimum, but it must be

maintained in order for the state to have something to do. There are no figures more representative of this state in the novel than the surgical monstrosities dreamed of by Benway and Doctor "Fingers" Schafer. The first is their proposal for a human body with one all-purpose hole, a plan the discussion of which leads off into the most infamous routine of the novel, "The Talking Asshole." Schafer, aka the Lobotomy Kid, also presents, at a tellingly-named "Meeting of International Conference of Technological Psychiatry" (Technological Psychiatry!) what he judges to be his Master Work. He prefaces introduction of the *work* with the claim that "the human nervous system can be reduced to a compact and abbreviated spinal column" (86), through a surgery which resembles a radical version of the lobotomy, itself at the height of its popularity (and controversy) when Burroughs was writing the novel. Benway's surgery results in what he calls "The Complete All American Deanxietized Man." The concept underlying this deanxietized man marks a somewhat curious reversal: if most of the tactics used to control and master the general population depend upon the jacking up of anxiety to unbearable levels, here the attempt to control man reduces that anxiety to zero and man is reduced to nothing but flesh, alive but not – a visionary advance for biopower. The attempt to subdue anxiety results in habits, which though rooted in the subject's own behavioral control mechanisms, introduce a drag into the system of control; they are a measure of counter-control on the level of the dominant social and governmental authorities.

In the novel, the human body presents itself as a sacred figure. It both attracts and repels, and its function is ambiguous – is it a site of resistance or a pathetic remainder? The standard approach to the Burroughsian body is to view it as analogous to the

Deleuzean body without organs. Deleuze and Guattari state that "The full body without organs is the unproductive, the sterile, the unengendered, the unconsumable" (8). And further: “The body without organs is not the proof of an original nothingness, nor is it what remains of a lost totality. Above all, it is not a projection; it has nothing whatsoever to do with the body itself, or with an image of the body. It is the body without an image." Deleuze and Guattari are not opposed to totality in all its forms, simply the form of totality which posits an end-state, a finality. Such an end-state is problematic for a number of reasons, including its manipulability: it may be organized, administered, and disciplined. Rather, totality must be seen as immanent and processual. The body as presented in *Naked Lunch* is precisely the body without an image. It gives the lie to the representation of the whole body, which is the “reinstituted territoriality” brought on by capitalism.

Timothy Murphy has also analyzed Naked Lunch’s importance to Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of the body without organs, although Murphy concludes his discussion by returning to Burroughs’s interest in the body of the junky as “the abyss into which such a formulation can lead without vigilance and caution” (98). This body “falls just as easily back into the structure of the disciplined, productive body of capitalism.” And as such, the body without organs as presented in Naked Lunch “never gives rise to subjective structures that can construct alternative social systems.” For Murphy, Burroughs’s representation of the body without organs, while highly suggestive of radical potentialities, is ultimately most significant when it functions as a cautionary tale, highlighting the dangers of the addicted body and its limited potential for revolutionary activity. Certainly, Murphy is correct that this is one formulation of the body proferred

by Burroughs, but not only should one consider other formulations presented in the novel, but note that there is the more general concern about how these bodies express affect.

As the earlier overview of commentary on the novel demonstrated, *Naked Lunch's* subversiveness is still being discussed, although now in a somewhat self-conscious way as the criticism often revolves around whether such discussion is warranted or useful. I would like to state unequivocally that, meta-discussions aside, I do feel that *Naked Lunch* is transgressive. But literary critics, both those favorable to the novel and those who feel that its use-value was negligible to begin with or has been exhausted, and the general public have neglected one of the most significant sources of the novel's persistent transgressiveness. It is not the graphic descriptions of drug use and sexual acts which are the most disturbing elements; nor is it the frequent depictions of killing and sacrifice (though those are more closely related to the core of the transgressiveness than the former); it is, rather, as I have been leading up to, the novel's depiction of the human body, particularly the human body as a form of meat, that works to provoke strong affective responses from its readers. As we will see, this interaction flows from the play of form and content. First, in order to explore this idea more thoroughly, I would like to return to Deleuze, but here his work on Francis Bacon's paintings in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, rather than his and Guattari's collaborative work on the body without organs.

Deleuze has written explicitly on Burroughs in a number of works, and in *Francis Bacon* he mentions him in passing as the author who best executes in literature one of the prominent features of Bacon's painting: representations of "scenes of love, of vomiting

and excreting...in which the body attempts to escape from itself through one of its organs in order to rejoin the field or material structure" (16). This is a "sensation" rather than an "imagining," in which an "intense movement flows through the whole body, a deformed and deforming movement" (18). In lieu of an overarching narrative and "imaginings," the momentum of *Naked Lunch* is sustained by these flows of movement of the body's repeated attempts to escape itself.

But there is another parallel between Burroughs's work and Bacon's which Deleuze does not remark upon. Deleuze asserts that in a number of Bacon's paintings there is a "zone of indiscernibility" between man and animal (20). This zone is constituted by the body "insofar as it is flesh or meat." "Meat," Deleuze says, "is not dead flesh; it retains all the sufferings and assumes all the colors of living flesh. It manifests such convulsive pain and vulnerability, but also such delightful invention, color, and acrobatics" (21). Furthermore, this common zone of man and the beast is where Bacon "identifies with the objects of his horror and his compassion." He goes on to note that this sentiment is similar to the horror accompanying sacrifice, a realization that "we are all criminals, we are all cattle" (22). This is a "deep identity," a "becoming." The horror at sacrifice and the dual identification with both Subject/Object it effects should at this point be familiar enough to my readers as one which Ngai and Altieri have discussed in their work on affect – and one that is a preoccupation of Bataille's, too, as in *Guilty* when he discusses the conflicting passion to sacrifice and be sacrificed (15) or in *Erotism*, where – discussing both animal life, meat, and sacrifice – he notes that "[t]he individual discontinuous existence of the animal was succeeded in its death by the organic continuity of life drawn into the common life of the beholders by the sacrificial

feast" (91): humans kill in sacrifice, but then become one with what they have killed, and the meat is not dead flesh.

Dead flesh is something from which we want to escape, something we fear, and in *Naked Lunch*, the drug addict uses junk because it "keeps off the hovering flesh" (60), a relation also addressed in Burroughs's earlier novel *Junky* as "freedom from the chains of the aging, cautious, nagging, frightened flesh" (128). But even here we see another function of flesh, which is closer to that of the meat referenced by Deleuze, in that flesh is personified, "living flesh" – not just biologically alive, but exhibiting the emotional states that are unavailable to the characters in *Naked Lunch*. But this constitutes part of the horror we have of flesh, because flesh can seem extravagant to us in its susceptibility to arousal, possessing a connection to affect which is always coursing through us at a subterranean level. It is weak, but its weakness is a type of extravagance, as Bataille describes it in *Erotism*, "The urges of the flesh pass all bounds in the absence of controlling will. Flesh is the extravagance within us set up against the law of decency" (92). Weak flesh transgresses the boundaries of the normative world or the law of decency.

However, flesh is represented as weak in the novel in ways not so extravagant. Flesh is also the boundary between the exterior and the interior, a "misshapen overcoat" (59), and in the novel this boundary is inconstant, fickle, revealing itself for what it is, a layer more permeable than we commonly suppose. Often it fails in its function to protect the bones, nerves, and viscera: "In the beginning his flesh was simply soft, so soft that he was cut to the bone by dust particles, air currents and brushing overcoats while direct contact with doors and chairs seemed to occasion no discomfort. No wound healed in his

soft tentative flesh…Long white tendrils of fungus curled round the naked bones" (60). That the boundary between interior and exterior is more permeable than we commonly suppose serves as the underlying principle for not only Burroughs's fiction, but his life philosophy. In the introduction to the original edition of *Queer*, he scoffs at those who proceed in life "as if there is some clear cut difference between inner and outer" (xix). It is also an example of where Burroughs's writing provides a counter-point to Ngai's theorization of ugly feelings. Ngai posits a tension between psychological interiors and bodily exteriors, which necessitates a divided and potentially antagonistic relationship between the two. Burroughs's work complicates this relationship by showing the two to be so tightly interwoven as to essentially exist as one, and ugly feelings evoke an affective state that cannot be divorced from the visceral reactions of the body: it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to determine relations such as causality.

Of course, this skepticism about distinguishing between inner and outer also undergirds some of Burroughs's more fantastical forays into magical thinking such as that of Reichian orgone theory and telepathy, both of which go beyond skepticism towards belief in the positive communion of inner and outer, mind and matter. A touch of this magical thinking graces Burroughs's faith in the power of his cut-ups. (Although tempting as it might be to see Burroughs as a somewhat imaginative and errant child, we should remember that everything, from the Metaphysical poets to Mayan codices, was fodder for his wide-ranging intelligence: he did not discriminate.) But the erasure of the difference between inner and outer is problematized in *Naked Lunch*. On the one hand, it represents the absolute lack of privacy within the surveillance state that is Interzone: nothing, not even the flesh, protects the subject from the all-seeing eye of the surveillance

state. If the flesh, as symbolic of the last defense of the subject's interiority, has been compromised, then the situation is hopeless. On the other hand, however, the erasure of this boundary, the permeability of the flesh, allows for the absolute communion of individuals and the merging of subject and object (literally so, in Burroughs's fiction), against our desires to believe in our secreted-away, independent selves. It is something like the aporetic exposure which Esposito recommends discussed in my earlier chapter. Moreover, this operation is one which reveals the heterogeneous body.

The world of exposure depicted in *Naked Lunch* is one in which all hitherto normative practices of the body are disrupted since normative behavior, along with habitual behavior, is a means of establishing security and isolating oneself. As a consequence of this process of disruption, the heterogeneous body begins to appear – in its inevitable fragmented fashion. The chapter "A.J.'s Annual Party," a party which is truly a horrifying and compelling sacred *fête,* provides the clearest example of this disruption of normative practices and the appearance of the heterogeneous body. At the start of the party scene, there is an interruption of the narration for an "On Screen" interlude (a representational distancing which collapses as the scene wears on). The young woman and young man in the following blue-movie scene seem innocent, fresh, and all-American. But the sex described is not the sex that would have been de rigeur for blue movies at the time; instead of the expected heteronormative sex, there are a variety of queer practices, including transvestitism and anal penetration with the semi-infamous strap-on named "Steely Dan," the inspiration behind the name of the 70's rock band.

As the scene continues, this transgression of heteronormative practices gives way to an explosive release of energy, a state of general economy effected in the action and in

the form. It is the particular province of literary narration to be able to depict both this and the other consequences that follow. The two participants in the movie are so merged, so continuous, that “their faces run together” (77), a blending of the Self and the Other. Identities shift back and forth among numerous bodies and characters who die in the scene come alive again, denying the reader a stable perspective – or encouraging the assumption of multiple ones. The excess manifests itself through wild scene changes (from a portrayal of a religious lunatic to a scene in Missouri to one in Georgia to an Old Man chasing a young boy), through the frenetic reincorporation of previously mentioned narrative elements (“the penny arcades open into a maze of dirty pictures,” for example, a phrase throughout the novel and suggestive of not only the passage from childish pastimes of American youth to more lurid adolescent interests, but also their actual physical conjunction since penny arcades were frequently located next to nudie booths), to a gallows scene which features the carnal desecration of a corpse and cannibalism and would fit just as well in *Story of the Eye*, both, for one, featuring enucleation. And in both *Story of the Eye* and *Naked Lunch*, the transgression of social norms through the sexual acts demands a similar transgression of metaphor in the coupling of tenors with relatively distant vehicles, stretching the sense of the metaphor to near nonsense. In *Story of the Eye*, an eye rolling over the skin is described thus: “The caress of the eye over the skin is so utterly, so extraordinarily gentle, and the sensation is so bizarre that it has something of a rooster’s horrible crowing” (83), a soft tactile sensation compared to a grating auditory sensation. In *Naked Lunch*, there is a similar stretching and metaphors seem to become literalized: "Johnny's cock swells, great rank bud burst out. A long tuber root creeps from Mary's cunt, feels for the earth. The bodies disintegrate in green

explosions." (84). The use of plants as vehicles for the tenor of flesh is not, perhaps, altogether uncommon in literature; however, here the flesh actually metamorphoses into plants. The plant metaphor is a fantastical one – that is, fantastical relative to the conventions of so-called serious literature or even to *Story of the Eye*, which is comparatively modest in its metaphorical language, although that modesty may in fact provoke more of a shock, as the symbolism then hews closer to our own reality.

There is a further similarity between *Story of the Eye* and *Naked Lunch*, that of the relation of narrative to metonymic desire. That metonymic inertia which occurs in *Story of the Eye* produces a loping narration, curving along with the rise and fall of action in each successive scene, impelled by the sacred objects (eyes, sun, eggs, testicles – *objets petit a* in the Lacanian formulation) and what might be called the sacred thirds or vanishing mediators in the form of individuals accompanying the couple. These easily identifiable motivating devices produce an almost palpable narrative energy. I would argue that in *Naked Lunch* there is the same metonymic desire, but that rather than creating a steady inertia, the energy produced by this metonymic desire is so excessive, it fragments the narrative in multiple ways: metaphorical language is restless, as tenors ceaselessly search for new vehicles, such that metaphor itself becomes a form of metonymy, catachresis; sentences, even whole passages, repeat; the "routines," which suggest a nervous interlocutor unable to let the conversation lapse into uncomfortable silence; notes, metacommentary, literary allusions, dramatic scenes, and songs. It is the special province of literary narration to be able to convey such an energy and heterogeneity of the elements.

Of course, these fictional devices are hallmark characteristics of postmodernist literature and thus are not unique to Burroughs's fiction. What is unique in Burroughs's fiction is the refusal to work up this energy, that which produces this fictional mode, into emotions (above and beyond the affect of feelings) and the insistence on the represented body's capacity to act as a locus for this affective energy. In part, this is accomplished through the relative lack of interiority of his characters and the unstable perspectives. But he also achieves this resistance to the emotional imperative through the nonlinearity of his texts. It is a nonlinearity which burrows its way down into even the very sentences themselves. To understand how such nonlinearity contributes to affect, it is important now to distinguish between affect and emotion, a difference I have been ignoring up to this point. Many affect theorists collapse the distinction between affect and emotion; Altieri does not do this, but after describing the problematic history of defining these terms, he chooses to include emotion as one type of affect, along with feelings (employed differently than in Ngai's work), moods, and passions. The terminology of affect theory can be confusing, so allow me to provide a brief summary clarification: there is a group of affect theorists who, though employing a variety of terms, agree upon the existence of a type of affect which is an *immediate*, pre-rational, barely perceptible, response grounded in physical sensation. Brian Massumi's argument in *Parables of the Virtual* provides the clearest description of this type of affect, and his definition depends upon distinguishing affect from emotion. Massumi says, "An emotion is a subjective content, the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal. Emotion is qualified intensity, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into

narrativizable action-reaction circuits, into function and meaning" (28). Affect or unqualified intensity (Massumi uses the terms interchangeably here), in contrast, is connected to non-linear processes, resonance and feedback, and remains outside the qualifying processes that insert intensity into the aforementioned progressions. Altieri's definition is quite similar: "affects are immediate modes of sensual responsiveness to the world characterized by an accompanying imaginative dimension" (2). He also discusses "conative energies," derived from Spinoza, just as Massumi's "intensity" is.

Altieri's and Massumi's similarly-grounded understandings of affect lead to similar assessments of affect's power. Because affect is unqualified, Massumi asserts, "it is not ownable or recognizable and is thus resistant to critique" (28), while Altieri believes that we need to attend to "the danger in and the appeal of affective states which generate values resistant to reason's authority" (2). Massumi (and Altieri) is gesturing toward something like what Bataille forcefully argues is the necessary critical (critical but paradoxically without being rational) approach toward the domination of reason and restricted economy: the practice of nonmeaning and the impossible. Of course, this is reminiscent of Schneiderman's critique of Burroughs which I mentioned earlier, what he called impossible readings, but for Schneiderman these readings essentially ask us to halt and go no further. Massumi's version of nonmeaning is one which highlights not the impossibility of meaning, but the impossibility of final, universal meaning and instead suggests the absolute contingency of meaning that occurs in what he calls "expression events." Not only is the meaning contingent in its originating instance but also in what will amount to its meanings generated through secondary elaboration.

A portion of Massumi's work in *Parables of the Virtual* is devoted to image-reception, including an analysis of the interaction of language and the visual. Utilizing a research experiment regarding the intensity of effects of images, he concludes that "matter-of-fact" narration seems to decrease the effects of images, while what he calls "emotional" narration seems to increase this: "an emotional qualification breaks narrative continuity for a moment to register a state – actually to re-register an already felt state, for the skin is faster than the word" (25). Unnamed in this description of the process is the force of affect. The immediate affectual is that "already felt state," which an emotional qualification "re-registers," thereby creating resonances of affect (which still then remain outside of the qualifying processes). This analysis is important in relation to Burroughs, because a casual understanding of Massumi's work on affect would seem to leave affect outside the domain of language, and therefore out of fiction. Instead, as Massumi notes, language is not opposed to intensity, but acts differentially in relation to it (*Parables* 25). Language doubles the flow of images leading to a redundancy of resonation and signification. Language and images combine (or resonate together) to form larger subsystems. I am taking liberties with Massumi's work here, but I believe that in Burroughs's work the relation between image and language described by Massumi is transformed into that of the relationship between imagistic language and narrative language, which is responsible for the ability of Burroughs's fiction to so memorably rouse affect.

This conjunction of imagistic language and narrative language largely circumvents one of Bataille's objections to poetry's convocations of the sacred. For Bataille, the commonplace emotional charge of words forms a blockage to an experience

of the sacred in literature: “[Poetry] never dispossesses us entirely, for the words…are charged with emotions already experienced, attached to objects which link them to the known” (*Inner Experience* 5). Elsewhere he praises classical poetry’s ability to maintain and defend a preserve of language not “stained with the servility” of everyday usage, but there is the suggestion that the fortifications have broken down (“Stone Age” 148). The idea that the words employed by poetry are “charged with emotions already experienced” is analogous to Massumi’s claim quoted earlier that emotions are “the point of insertion of intensity into…function and meaning.” Bataille would seem not to grant literature the ability to overcome the tiredness of servile emotional qualifications; however, he does point the way to another avenue within the dramatic arts: "Hence we have dramatic art, using non-discursive sensation, making every effort to strike, for that reason imitating the sound of the wind and attempting to chill -- as by contagion: it makes a character tremble on stage" (13). With this reference to “non-discursive sensation” (tellingly juxtaposed with contagion), Bataille comes close to articulating an idea of affect. If Bataille was regrettably closed to the possibility of such sensation being conveyed through literature, we can use the modified Massumi to understand how Burroughs does so.

It might appear as if I am stretching the bounds of both these arguments, trying to force arguments constructed around the non-discursive or the visual onto literature. But I believe Burroughs’s method of cutting-up his texts, thereby disturbing language in its narrative capacity, warrants such an approach. Burroughs himself thought his writing comparable to the visual arts, noting its frequent “cryptic significance of juxtaposition” and likening it to “objects abandoned in a hotel drawer, a form of still life” (*Letters* 288). The word-images, or rebuses, present in *Naked Lunch* express physical sensations, and

these sensations resonate with the narrative language. This approach is strongest in *Naked Lunch*; the word-images are relatively rare in the earlier texts, whereas the narrative language (and the emphasis on the body) is lacking in the later texts. The focus on the body in *Naked Lunch* intensifies the experience of sensation and resonance. The intensification arising from the body's prominent position occurs, in part, because descriptions of the body always seem to arouse more passionate responses from individuals, a natural receptivity based in identificatory structures. *Naked Lunch* also presents the body most often through its constituent parts, that is, the body is almost always fragmented, such that the body parts are those word-images; but the fragmented body also elicits a strong affective response because of its heterogeneity, its incapacity to be inscribed with the territorializing flows of capitalism. In "The Psychological Structure of Fascism," Bataille defines the heterogeneous world as being composed of "everything resulting from unproductive expenditure" which includes, among other things, "the parts of the body" (142). He goes on to say "heterogeneous elements will provoke affective reactions of varying intensity."

In both *Story of the Eye* and in *Naked Lunch*, there is a concentration on the expelled matter of the body because in the act of transgression the body cannot control itself, an excretory heterology of the body. One of the "refrains" of *Naked Lunch*, a phrase repeated throughout, one which occurs both in the passages describing New York City and in those describing Interzone, suggesting their close relationship, is "bales of aborted foetuses, broken condoms, bloody Kotex, shit wrapped in bright color comics" (64). This passage serves as a constant reminder of the expelled matter of our bodies which we wish to ignore. Consider, too, how the following moment of a character's

sexual pleasure: he is among “a maze of penny arcades and dirty pictures” (another refrain, which I have mentioned previously) when “A sharp turd shoots clean out his ass. Farts shake his slender body” (66). The first phrase which locates the subject is possessed of some beauty of midcentury nostalgia, but the next references to the body combine the erotic with the ribald, much like in *Story of the Eye* when the eyeball held between Simone’s buttocks “zoomed out like a pit squooshed from a cherry” (83). Our bodies’ weaknesses provoke discomfort – and laughter. The disruption to our self-conceptions produces irreconcilable affects. The example drawn from *Story of the Eye* highlights another aspect of the manner in which the heterogeneous is conveyed in both novels. It is not only the typical biological expulsions which are represented – parts of the body which are normally considered to be secure in the body’s integrity are torn away.

As Bataille says, in one of his acknowledgements of the power of literature, “a sacrifice is a novel, a story, illustrated in a bloody fashion” (*Erotism* 87). Sacrificial death reveals the absence of a victim, that is, it suppresses the victim as a distinct object, thus suppressing the barrier between the Self and the Other, and this “absence becomes the content of the moment that sacrifice or poetry ‘bestows’ to sight” (“Stone Age” 150). Bataille goes on to say that this “awakens sensibility and we pass from the sphere of usable and intelligible objects.” There are innumerable depictions of sacrifice in *Naked Lunch*: lynchings, erotic asphyxiation, voluntary martyrdom. However, I believe there is another symbolic sacrificial victim in the text which is a phantasmatic, pre-existing body. The organs and other body parts in *Naked Lunch* are no longer usable or intelligible, so convulsed by spasms of death and eroticism that they fly off, as if blown apart by the

explosive energy of the text, fragmented to the point of unrecognizability. The fragility of this physical integrity is symbolic of the fragility of the illusion of our own subjectivity and a reminder of our own heterogeneity. Our bodies are revealed to have been phantasmatic, and as we read the novel, we find ourselves consumed by the sense that we, all of us, are at base nothing more than these constituent parts, moving towards or away from each other, a prospect both comforting and horrifying.

CHAPTER 3

THE LIVING THESIS: *DHALGREN*, THE HETEROEGENEOUS BODY, AND THE FORMATION OF SACRED COMMUNITY

Samuel Delany's *Dhalgren* and Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* occupy similar uneasy positions in the popular imagination. Both novels are notorious for their transgressive subject matter and for their formal experimentation. For their popular audiences, these two features seem to provoke either vehement rejection for violating generic expectations or a fervent fanaticism which extends to the authors of the novels, elevating them into literary cult icons. At the very least, literary scholars acknowledge that the works break new ground for popular or generic fiction through their experimental attributes, but overall there is a relative dearth of scholarly work, a situation not uncommon for fiction which has achieved a measure of popular success. But despite their similarities, the differences between Burroughs and Delany are significant and should not be elided. I do not wish to oppose the two novels to one another, but rather position them along a continuum which covers all the various positions and representations of the body as subjected to biopolitical norms. In *Naked Lunch*, the body is always a freighted body, heavy with norms, with guilt, with anxiety. It is the Deleuzian body which has been overdetermined by various normativizing flows. Burroughs exploits this normative weight in order to evoke extreme affect. In contrast, as I hope to demonstrate, Delany's *Dhalgren* begins precisely where Burroughs leaves off in *Naked Lunch*. Burroughs's fiction reveals to us the heterogeneous body; Delany reveals it – and then shows what is possible in the wake of that revelation. The body can be refashioned into what Bataille

termed the sacred or heterogeneous body, one which then provides the foundations for a new type of community.

The novel opens with the arrival of an unnamed character in an unknown city, which we will later learn is called Bellona, a city that has suffered a cataclysmic event. This arrival is accompanied by fragmentation on the level of language and confusion on the level of narrative. We readers are left wondering how to proceed, and although it does not ultimately prove to be a comprehensive interpretive schema, the title of the chapter is "Prism, Mirror, Lens," which gives us some clue as to how we are to read this section. All of the optical devices of the title reflect or refract parallel rays of light which strike their surfaces. We then must conclude that we will not have access to the original visual image – or, extrapolating, the original signified – but will only be permitted its mediated form. The first full paragraph of this section, which follows three independent sentences, provides a prismatic view of the world left behind by the strange narrator. Beginning with the clause "All you know I know," it establishes an identity between the narrator, no longer as strange, and the audience. This identification is predicated upon the audience's recognition of this world. However, while the passage draws upon what should be familiar to the audience, it also jars the audience's expectations by juxtaposing seemingly incongruous elements: an astronaut and a bank clerk, an actress and a freight elevator operator. The incongruity is based upon the different social statuses of the named individuals. What links them despite their differences, though, is that they are all defined by their roles as workers, subjects of a time and motion study, their representations each capturing a slice of their movements, their therbligs, a commonality reinforced by a

reference to the work clock: “careening astronauts and bank clerks glancing at the clock before lunch.”

The world that has been left behind, then, is primarily defined by its character of labor. The distinction between the profane world of work and the sacred is fundamental to Bataillean philosophy. In *Erotism*, Bataille, drawing from Weber and Freud, posits that it is work which separates humans from animals. It is only through mastery of our irrational, animalistic, violent impulses that we are able to build civilization through our work. This work is a vehicle for a certain type of collectivity, one which “opposes those contagious impulses to excess” through rational behavior and taboos (41). Work “reduces everything to order.” The workers of various stripes mentioned in the passage from *Dhagren* represent this working collective and the work they do is that which orders the world, an ordering which Delany alludes to in his collection *The Straits of Messina*:

> "Marx still provides the basic transformation by which the rare, simple declarative statement in the nonstop din of this language of human-made, human-charged, and human-structured signs may be translated into its political, economic, and spiritual equivalent: who made it? how much were they paid? who profited, and by how much, by its sale? who profits most from its having been put specifically there—in that specific syntagmatic order with the world around it?" (55)

Delany is using this Marxist transformation as a point of departure for the events of the novel. The narrator has left that world, and is now an individual without the working collective, adrift in disorder.

But to what world has the narrator come? If we follow Bataille's logic, Bellona is opposed to the world left behind as the sacred is opposed to the profane. I use the formulation "the world left behind," but as the text intimates, this world has, in fact, forgotten Bellona – there is no National Guard, no news coverage, no other trappings of the contemporary response to disasters. Realistically, it is unlikely that a city which has undergone a cataclysmic event would ever be forgotten; it would, instead, be the center of mass media attention (though one might have to modify this supposition in light of New Orleans after Katrina). On a symbolic level, this works to reinforce the suspicion that Bellona is the world of the sacred which has been forgotten by the world of the profane, though here we might call it a mutual forgetting.

We may propose such a distinction between the profane and the sacred, but it is still unclear what cataclysmic event has struck. In the paragraph which begins "All you know I know," there is mention of student riots (possibly a reference to the May '68 student strike in France or even various student protests in the United States in the '60's) and food shortages. Commentators over the years have ascribed numerous causes to the wrecked state of Bellona, including the possibilities mentioned in the text and others also – a race riot (Comer 173; Haslam 83), white flight (Fox 105), the rape of a white girl by a black man (Gawron 78), or a *coup d'etat* (Comer 173). But it is maybe more appropriate to see the cataclysm as an empty marker which signifies only the irruption of irrational and violent impulses into the ordered world, thus allowing for these multiple interpretations. Thus, "All you know I know" becomes – briefly in the context of the paragraph – an implied "all you don't know I don't know," a delimiting of the mutual

knowledge shared by narrator and audience, and carries the suggestion that rational knowledge may not be sufficient to the task of interpretation.

The paragraph concludes (the fact that I have spent so much time analyzing a one-sentence paragraph is a testament to the richness of the novel) with the following description: “how coffee tastes after you’ve held it in your mouth, cold, a whole minute.” If the passage began with the identification of individuals through their roles as workers and hinted at the working collective, it ends with a return to the body, but one accomplished through the recollection of a rather unpleasant sensation. Or what the average reader might consider unpleasant, though curiously the sensation is presented without judgment. In terms of the narrative, this seemingly jarring sensation functions as the inauguration of a coming to awareness of the body by the central character. In this brief moment, the remembered minute, the narrative passes from memory, disembodiment, and sensation and crosses a threshold to presence, embodiment, and consciousness. This is not to say that disorientation ceases – arguably the disorientation of the opening never truly recedes through the course of the narrative to follow, only rises and falls – but in this moment of rebirth, we see the tide begin to ebb.

Before I pursue this line of thought any further, I should address what strikes many readers as the most immediately arresting aspect of the novel’s opening and proves to be the preoccupation of the majority of critics, which is its experimental nature. The novel opens with a sentence fragment that appears to be the end of a sentence – “to wound the autumnal city.” – and suggests if not to the typical science fiction reader, then to the reader versed in experimental literature, the possibility of a circular narrative. This suggestion of circularity is reinforced by the content of the sentence which evokes the

cycles of the seasons, specifically summoning up the associations – somewhat oddly placed relative to the beginning of a novel – of the period of senescence before death (and then rebirth). It is a challenging beginning for a novel which was published as a work of popular science fiction. Of course, in many ways, *Dhalgren does* meet the expected parameters of science fiction. Not only was its author, at the time of publication, a renowned science fiction writer, it also exhibits hallmarks of sci-fi: a seemingly apocalyptic setting, surreal environmental phenomena such as the ballooning sun, and advanced technology like the holographic projections used by the novel's prominent gang. (Arguably, these very markers of sci-fi ultimately undo the novel's sci-fi classification: the apocalyptic setting is never explained and the environmental phenomena and manifestations of advanced technology are rare.) But a reader who opens the book hoping for a pulpy page-turner of a "B-production," as Burroughs would have termed it, will be disappointed…or at least confused. Through its experimental opening, the novel defies not only the generic expectations a reader brings to the text but also the broader fictive expectations.

The aesthetic challenge of the text has led many critics to try to make sense of the novel in terms of this challenge itself. Jean Mark Gawron, taking a semiotic approach, compares the novel's structure to a desk organizer, in which disorder overcomes methods of order only for a new, unintentional order to take its place: "In *Dhalgren*, in what is really a very similar process, the emblems of disorder are made instruments of order" (64). He argues, "The motivating force of the novel, and of information in general, is that a surprising datum correspondingly narrows the field of expectation with its informative impact, thus increasing the chance for further surprises" (66). Similarly interested in the

undoing of expectations, Robert Elliot Fox suggests that the stranger aspects of the novel "raise expectations in the reader that are thwarted as the book refuses to pursue 'predictable' or familiar avenues. The unreal, in effect, is rendered incidental. It is not the purpose of the novel to give us explanations for everything; its actual thrust concerns the responses of (ordinary?) people to the odd, the unprecedented, indeed the inexplicable." (105). While both of these critics are correct in their assessment in the significant challenges posed to the reader's expectations, I cannot help but wonder if something is not lost through the emphasis on the interpretive challenges alone. It might be more useful to consider how these particular formal elements contribute to an interpretation of the text that goes beyond their challenge to interpretation.

Taking the same point of departure as the above critics, we should first consider why the text opens with such an alienating move. It is, at least in part, a statement about experimental literature and this particular novel's position within that tradition. If experimental literature is commonly viewed as the avant-garde, the leading edge of literature, this novel begins at that edge and proposes a rethinking of language itself which can only begin at the furthest point imaginable and then will proceed beyond that. Ideologically speaking, it suggests that whatever revolutionary political and social vision is to follow must first require a reworking of language. Everyday language is not suited to the task which is set before the novel. In his pioneering collection of critical essays on science fiction, *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw*, Delany praises the "particular verbal freedom" of science fiction (12). He examines the issue of "subjunctivity," the tension of meaning that accompanies the juxtaposition of sound-images with other sound-images. While realistic or naturalistic fiction is concerned with *events that could have happened* and

fantastical fiction with *events that could not have happened*, science fiction is concerned with *events that have not happened*, and the subjunctivity of this particular formulation can often be exhilarating (10-12). The verbal freedom of science fiction "couple[s] with the corrective process that allows the whole range of the physically explainable universe" – this corrective process, which Delany demonstrates at length in the essay through an analysis of the sentence "the red sun is high, the blue low," is something like the process of ordering disorder that Gawron discusses, but not quite – allows science fiction to "produce the most violent leaps of imagery." The effect of this is to "throw us worlds away." One could easily amend that sentence to give it another, equally valid sense: "throw worlds away." It is akin to the mutual forgetting of the profane world and the sacred world, but more importantly it is only by throwing away the world outside of Bellona that a new world can be postulated.

We have said that the real world and Bellona are positioned as the profane and the sacred, but we should extend this analogy by examining the specific valences of their relationship. It would not seem to function as a utopia – there is no sense that life in Bellona is ideal. Nor does it function as a dystopia. Bellona corresponds most fully to a heterotopia, as Foucault theorizes in "Of Other Spaces." That Delany has been interested in the idea of the heterotopia is given support with the subtitle of one of the novels which was to follow upon the heels of *Dhalgren*. Originally published as *Triton*, the title was later amended to *Trouble on Triton: An Ambiguous Heterotopia*. Interestingly, Bellona is mentioned in *Trouble on Triton* as the city on Mars from which the central character hails. However, we are told little about it, and thus it seems that in *Trouble on Triton*,

Bellona occupies the same status as an imaginary site relative to the rest of the world that it occupies in *Dhalgren*.

In *Dhalgren*, Bellona is both a heterotopia of crisis, given the cataclysmic event, and possibly a heterotopia of deviation, too, given the lifestyles of the inhabitants. It also appears to be a heterochrony. As Foucault notes, "The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time." As we have described, Bellona appears to be a city out of time. Given the perverse relation in time and space which Bellona occupies, it is also somewhat impenetrable, or rather, selectively permeable. This corresponds with another characteristic of heterotopias: "Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable. In general, the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place." As the narrative reaches its end (or its point of circularity, depending on your perspective), Kid and a few others encounter a woman, who is an uncanny double of Kid, entering the city. She observes that there's traffic going into the city, just not much. It is not that one cannot enter the city – there are no obvious barriers – but that "It's just the closer you get, the funnier…everybody acts" (799).

There is a curious inversion of spaces in the novel which supports the theory that Bellona is a heterotopia. Early on, the narrator, who has been dubbed Kidd by some of the inhabitants (though this name itself, mutable like the narrator, will undergo a change into "Kid," one "d") , decides to take a job for a family, the Richards, who still live in an apartment complex. The Richards preserve the pretense of normalcy amongst the chaos surrounding them. When Kidd first arrives at the Richards' home, his introductory meeting with Mrs. Richards is punctuated by the clattering sounds of vandals running

about in the hallway and apartments surrounding the Richards' place, sounds which Mrs. Richards, possibly on the verge of mental collapse, desperately tries to ignore. Mystifyingly, Mrs. Richards appears semi-oblivious to what has happened in Bellona. Every sign of chaos is interpreted by her as either inanely benign (the vandals in the hallway are rowdy kids, not a true threat) or temporary (the decaying state of the apartment complex will soon be repaired), and she continuously defers to the absent authorities such as the oft-invoked "Management" of the complex and her husband's superiors at work, as when Kidd suggests they borrow electricity from the hallway and she replies that "Management wouldn't be very happy about that" because "the hall lights aren't on our utilities" (126), this despite all evidence that Management has disappeared.

Mrs. Richards functions within this enclosed family space as a classic Lacanian hysteric, who demands of her Other – in this case, the whole family, although it is her husband who primarily takes on the role – an answer, speech which will order the chaos. It is for her, for the preservation of her comforting identity of a housewife and mother, that her husband leaves each day for work which no longer exists, that her family keeps from her the knowledge of her daughter's sexual encounter with a black man named George who has become semi-mythic in Bellona, that they all participate in charades of dinner parties. As Mr. Richards observes, "She projects this…well, nervousness. And then you start to try and figure out what she wants you to say; and you say it. At first so you won't get her upset. Then, out of habit" (173). What Mrs. Richards demands from her fellow interlocutors is the prolongation of normative life which had been the rule in the Bellona that once was. Relative to the Richards, what we have is precisely the inverse of the real world we inhabit: We live in a profane world where only traces of the

sacred persist: small sects, cults, sacred flare-ups which then disappear. In *Dhalgren*, the Richards try to hang on to the profane, persisting in the norms which constitute the profane, in the midst of a sacred world.

The absurdity of this position is not lost on Kidd: "Work till sunset in a city where you never see the sun? He laughed" (136). When asked by another character, Lanya, about the family, he replies, "They're stark. They're pretty twitty too. They haven't started raving, but that's just a matter of time" (168). Though the family's efforts to preserve their former lives are intense, the end result is a gutting of meaning, their lives full of "hollow dialogue" and "calculated inconsequence," in Kidd's view (136, 140). Even Mr. Richards can't help but feel of the house that "none of it is real," that it will "just crumble, like an eggshell, like plaster" (173, 174), though this directly counters Mrs. Richards assertion that "This is a real home, a place where real things happen, to real people" (226). Both Mr. and Mrs. Richards' statements prove true, though Mrs. Richards' does so only in the prophetic sense. Kidd's time at the Richards' concludes with the irruption of the Lacanian Real into the life of the family when the Richards' youngest son, Bobby, falls down a dilapidated elevator shaft. The eggshell cracks in this confrontation with death. Kidd retrieves the corpse, and in the process finds himself aroused:

> He pulled at the arm, got a grip around the chest, which was all soft against him. His own shirt front soaked immediately. Blood dribbled along his forearm. Standing, he dragged the body back a step. A foot caught, pulled free; the leg fell back against his thigh – his thigh wet, warm, to the knee. Dragging it, limp, reaching for the rope, he thought: Is

> this what turns on blood and blade freaks? He thought of Tak, he thought of George, hunted in himself for any idle sexuality: he found it, disconcertingly, a small warmth above the loins that, as he bared his teeth and the rope slid through his sticky hand, went out. (232)

Kidd is sensitive to the erotics which inhabit this moment. Not only does the death of the son signal the collapse of the last remnant of normative space, a final transgression against it, there is also a libidinal charge which occurs when one is forced to handle death's materiality, a result of the transgression of the taboo against touching a corpse.

Foucault's essay, "Of Other Spaces," is provocative, but its brevity results in a number of suggestive gaps – which could very well be responsible for the essay's continued currency – including the absence of a consideration of the erotics of transgression within a heterotopic space, an absence which is part of the larger lacuna regarding the subjects who inhabit heterotopic spaces. However, using Foucault's essay on Bataille, "A Preface to Transgression," and Bataille's own work, I believe we can productively fill in these gaps. Unquestionably, Bataille influenced Foucault – he has called Bataille "one of the most important writers of the century" (3). We could even propose that, given their similar roots, the term "heterotopia" is derived from Bataille's theory of the heterogeneous and his suggestion of a science of heterology. Might Foucault's essay on heterotopias even be a treatise on this? Consider what Foucault says about Bataillean transgression in "A Preface to Transgression": "Transgression does not seek to oppose one thing to another, nor does it achieve its purpose through mockery or by upsetting the solidity of foundations; it does not transform the other side of the mirror, beyond an invisible and uncrossable line, into a glittering expanse" ("A Preface to

Transgression" 35). We can compare this to what he says of utopias in "Of Other Spaces": "Utopias are sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces." Utopias, as he describes them here, seem to transform that other side of the mirror, turning it into a glittering expanse that heterotopias do not. Following this logic, then, heterotopias are those spaces which perform the same cultural function that transgression does.

Foucault closes his essay by suggesting that heterotopias "have a function in relation to all the space that remains." He states that they are spaces of illusion or of compensation. However, I would like to propose that this particular heterotopia is a space of waste, or the heterogeneous, as Bataille would have it. How might we define Bellona as a waste product of the real world? It is not, precisely, the typical deprivations of the disaster scenario – the food shortages, the shuttered stores, the closing of industry, the reduced population, and so forth – which classifies it as such; rather, it is the absence of what Bataille terms "systems of appropriation" ("Use-Value" 97). Capitalism, philosophy, religion, and even poetry are all potential systems of appropriation which are "characterized by a homogeneity (static equilibrium)" that is established through the identification of possessor and object, the known and the unknown, the total poetic conception and the world. Bataille speaks of the waste products of these systems of appropriation; but Bellona is the waste product of the world in which these systems of appropriation rule, one in which these systems no longer hold, and, it should be pointed

out, the novel itself is an artifact which, judging by its reception, also defies these systems.

As pointed out earlier, the larger lacuna in Foucault's piece "Of Other Spaces" concerns the inhabitants of heterotopias, of whom Foucault has little to say. If Bellona is a heterotopia, then I would like to argue that it is populated by individuals who possess heterogeneous bodies and interact with other heterogeneous bodies through what I will call a general economy of the body – though this statement is already problematic in that it reproduces the division between subject and object, both between bodies and within individual (the body as object). As far as I am aware, Bataille himself does not use the term "heterogeneous body." However, the body is important to his description of the heterogeneous. The heterogeneous world "includes everything resulting from unproductive expenditure" such as waste products of the human body, parts of the body, things possessing erotic value, parts of the unconscious, mobs, warrior, violent individuals, madmen, leaders, etc. ("Psychological Structure" 142). This observation of Bataille's describes the heterogeneous from an objective perspective, but what does it mean to *live* the heterogeneous body? Living the heterogeneous body means living in a state of disequilibrium and disorientation, a state of flux, in which identity is always precariously shifting, the individual is subjected to the most wild of passions, mastery is renounced, and exposure is embraced. It is to live the sacred through the body self-consciously – and this is an experience to which Bataille dedicated himself.

Kidd exists in such a state. His stay in Bellona begins with extreme disorientation. After the initial fragmentary opening, his arrival in Bellona is inaugurated by a not-quite Edenic coupling as he, still unnamed at this point, meets a strange woman,

also unnamed, and they engage in a frenzied act of sexual expenditure, discarding any courtship rituals and breaking the taboo against sexual relations with strangers, which guide relations in the world outside of Bellona. The encounter with another human spawns a brood of questions for Kidd concerning his identity. He wonders about his "father" and his "mummer," a Freudian slip wherein mother is substituted for a masked actor or celebrant, one whose mask will not be removed for the narrator. "Who am I?" he queries of his partner, and then shortly after, he acknowledges, "I've lost something." To which his partner replies, "Things have made you what you are. What you are will make you what you will become." He has suffered a dual dispossession – he is dispossessed of both his things and his identity, the latter inextricably associated with the former.

The loss of his identity is most directly manifested in the loss of his former name, which, according to the logic of the above, is just another *thing*, and its loss is realized concurrently with the loss of a material thing, one of his sandals. As Kidd relates to Tak, one of the first people he meets in Bellona proper, he lost his sandal while being chased by a dog, after which a family in a truck picked him up. The mother asked his name, and he wasn't able to tell her. As the narrator describes it, "I mean, you don't go around thinking about yourself by your own name, do you? Nobody does – unless somebody calls to you by it, or asks you what it is…It's just something I haven't thought of for a long time" (41). And then there is a curious slippage: "It doesn't bother me. Missing a sandal, I mean." The association between Kidd's missing shoe and missing name, one's name being the keystone of one's identity, is the negative formulation of the relationship between identity and things which obtains in the world outside Bellona, the world of the appropriative tendency – you are what you own, in other words, and if you don't own

much, then who are you? In the world of restricted economy, the world of appropriation, the connection between the aspects of things and identity is unquestionable, and the loss of one's things might precipitate a general existential crisis. However, in Bellona, this concurrent loss will prove to be a release.

This connection between things and identity is alluded to in an earlier passage also: "From this play of night, light, and leather, can I let myself take identity? How can I recreate this roasted park in some meaningful matrix? Equipped with contradictory visions, an ugly hand caged in pretty metal, I observe a new mechanics. I am the wild machinist, past destroyed, reconstructing the present" (24). The pretty metal caging the narrator's hand is an "orchid," a weapon specific to Bellona, which he found shortly after he arrived in the city. The discovery of a weapon is a hallmark of the fantasy genre, but here it also serves the purpose of destabilizing the narrator's self-image through the "contradictory visions" and thus provides an opening for the formation of a new, if precarious, present identity.

This destabilization or disequilibrium extends beyond self-image to manifest itself across the entire field of the Kidd's perception. If you will grant me the conceit of employing scientific terminology for a moment, purely for its classificatory efficacy, the disturbance intersects Kidd's proprioception, his sense of the relative positioning of his body's parts and their movement, and his exteroception, that is, his perception of the outside world, and his interoception, or perception of his inner body. The caged hand and sandaled foot throw off the smoothness of his movements, serving as a frequent jarring reminder of these movements which might otherwise pass into the oblivion of habit. In the following moment from the novel, only one representative example among many, the

simple motion of walking becomes disrupted into its component movements: “Bare foot and sandal, bare foot and sandal: he watched the pavement’s grain slip between them” (75). The division effects an alienation of the body’s parts such that these parts themselves become other, heterogeneous. In a continuation of the above scene, Kidd is attacked by Bellona’s resident gang, the Scorpions. Stunned, first he imagines himself moving, although he doesn’t, but then goaded into action, he defends himself with the brass orchid. Except…once the fight is over, he becomes confused: “His orchid had been hanging from his waist. No time had he reached down to…slip his roughened fingers into the harness, fasten the collar about his knobby wrist” (81). Here Kidd has forgotten his movements, not out of habit, but due to a response to the violence that is symptomatic of life in Bellona. It is as if someone has possessed his body for a moment and then he is brought back to it.

His external perception is marked by the most violent of disorientations. He experiences synaesthesia early on in the narrative: “It’s easy, he thought, to put sounds with either white (maybe the pure tone of an audio generator; and the other, its opposite, that was called white noise), black (large gongs, larger bells), or the primary colors (the variety of the orchestra). Pale grey is silence” (60). Kidd also experiences large lapses in time, a condition that worsens as the narrative progresses, causing him to lose weeks at a time. Similarly, spatial disorientation is a feature common to Bellona residents, through seemingly impossible shortcuts and destinations that no one appears to know how to get to – but somehow do, anyway. And then there are Kidd’s encounters with people who suddenly appear to have red eyes, which ultimately prove to be artificial, a cheap funhouse gag found numbering the hundreds in old boxes. (A number of other elements

of Bellonan life stand revealed by the end of the novel as tricks, perpetrated by no one in particular; yet their artificiality seems negligible, both because so much is left unexplained or inadequately explained and because the surreal transformations of social conditions in Bellona, which are not as flashy and take more time to be exposed, ultimately prove more extraordinary than red eyes or holographic light projections.)

Just as Kidd's sense of his body's parts and movements and his sense of the external world are disoriented, so too has the stability of his internal perception been disrupted. It is not quite disordered, but is a type of heightened awareness, not always pleasant. In the morning after he has sex, Kidd's "body felt hip heavy" and his "tongue lay down like a worm in his mouth" (61). He notes that "Mornings after sex usually gave him that I've been eating the lotus again, that Oh-all-soft-and-drifty, that hangover-inside-out where pain is all in the world and the body tingly and good. Delayed? But here it was. The commune?" The disorder of the senses in most cases is brought about by Bellona. While in dialogue with the character June, Kidd finds his body reacting in an unconscious fight-or-flight manner; he has to "[force] his shoulders down; they'd hunched to fend something he had not even consciously acknowledged an attack" (135). Food most frequently provides a sense of disorientation: tastes "[stagger] in his mouth" (183). And his body's feelings are sometimes lost to him: "Fingering the blades at his waist, hearing, not feeling an edge rasp his callused thumb" (328).

Just as Kidd's sense of perception has been skewed, so have others' perceptions of him. His features are resistant to analysis based upon racial markers. This proves vaguely disconcerting to a number of Bellona's inhabitants. As one character puzzles, "you're not colored, are you? I mean you're pretty dark. Sort of full-featured" (73). The

narrator is forced to decide, with "resigned wrath," that he is American Indian. Like a number of other characters in Delany's work, Kidd's racial markers are unclear. Though this ambiguous racial identification cannot be attributed to life in Bellona, exactly, it is symbolic of the confusion that reigns in the city. More generally speaking, all the tried and true methods of intersubjective relations which rely upon the stereotypical markers of race, gender, and sexuality are nearly functionally useless in the city.

While Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* exhibits the heterogeneous body through its parts-aspects, in *Dhalgren* it is the body's sense of its relation to the world which has been eradicated, reduced to near nonsense. This is another form of the heterogeneous. In "The Use-Value of D.A.F. de Sade," Bataille defines heterology as opposed to the "homogeneous representation of the world." Our habituated perceptual orientations are homogeneous and have been shaped by the forces of biopower. Through the erasure of this primary legibility of the body, Delany's fiction allows us to begin to reconstitute the subject and the subject's relation to the community, who have all been brought to a similar reduced state.

If we grant that the population of Bellona is comprised of individuals who, due to the conditions of existence in the decimated city of Bellona, have come to inhabit and be cognizant of their heterogeneous bodies, then we are forced to consider how such a population may begin to constitute a community – if it does at all. It would be misleading to claim that the city as a whole is a community. Though there is an echo of a community that is predicated upon the shared surroundings, the generally recognized symbols such as George, and the various mythical aspects of life in the city, by the end of the narrative, George's demi-god status has been diminished and the mythical elements

revealed to be gimmicks and cons. There is also at least one community that forms and fails, that of the group in the park. But it is the Scorpions gang which seems to offer something like a successful ("successful" only in a very qualified way) model of community. Before turning to the specifics of the community models in the novel, however, I would like to consider Bataille's contribution to theories of community, through both his own work and that of those who have been influenced by him.

Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito is one of those philosophers who have been influenced by Bataille. His powerful analysis of the immunitarian paradigm's domination of Western thinking regarding community provides us with a better understanding of how *Dhalgren*'s formulation of Bellonan society begins to contravene modern community models. According to Esposito, the immunitarian paradigm rests upon the interrelation of sovereignty, property, and liberty. For our purposes, it is Esposito's discussion of sovereignty and property which are most applicable to *Dhalgren*[viii]. Esposito begins this discussion by arguing that Western philosophers, most notably Hobbes, posit that groups of individuals threaten the body in its materiality, its immediacy (58). The belief in the inherent antagonism of individual relations, that were it not for the state, we would exist in a ruthless Hobbesian state of nature, and the corresponding need to immunize ourselves against this, has come to pervade all of modern life. *Dhalgren* hints at the importance of this to the profane world, when Kidd observes of June Richards, who as the Richards' daughter symbolizes the attempt to

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[viii] Liberty, in relation to his immunitarian paradigm, undergoes a "negative reconversion" in modernity. Liberty becomes "negative liberty," transitions from a positive "freedom" to "freedom from" (70). While a compelling examination, his proposal is more suited to the modern security state than the strange world of Bellona depicted in the novel.

preserve the normative world: "It's not even...that she's a pretty girl, but rather that there are over two dozen people living in here and the isolation she demands about her destroys our concept of human space. That their hostility comes out in sexual leers and sexual jibes...is a generic response to something far more personal than her gender" (563). June builds a wall of personal space that keeps all others at bay (one which destroys what is importantly characterized by Kidd as the sense of *human* space which those in the gang share). Her wary proxemic behavior is a symptom of normative immunitarian behavior.

But, as Esposito points out in his historical analysis, personal attempts to preserve the body, to immunize it, ultimately are not sufficient. This is why we need the law. However, there's an initial conflict: we want to satisfy ourselves, to acquire all we need, but this contradicts our desire for self-preservation because it generates conflict. We can sense the negative logic, the negative dialectic, which will be put into play. We must step outside ourselves (a transcendental move), or negate ourselves, negate our nature in order to preserve our nature. This is a sort of primary immunity (59), which we then supplement with a secondary immunity of sovereignty, something outside us which will guarantee our self-preservation. Sovereign immunization is "an immanent transcendence situated outside the control of those that also produced it as the expression of their own will" (60). The sovereign is able to preserve life because we grant him the power to take away life. This is the "sacrificial dynamic" (62) at the heart of sovereignty.

Esposito then considers property, primarily via Locke. To begin, life and property are seen as mutually constitutive (one could, I think, easily substitute many other terms here – subject and object, personhood and thingness – but he is dealing with Locke): "without a life in which to inhere, property would not be given; but without

something of one's own – indeed, without prolonging itself in property – life would not be able to satisfy its own primary demands and thus it would be extinguished" (64). The privacy of appropriation and possession leads to the subtractive nature and the negative logic underlying property as it relies on specifying with whom one does not share the object: "It is 'one's own' that is not common, that does not belong to others" (68). The individual is an individual to the extent that he is able to immunize himself from the expropriative character of community. The corollary to this insight is that the rampant consumerism of contemporary capitalism, its restricted economy of accumulation, and the glorification of individualism are revealed to be more intimately connected than previously believed.

Though Esposito is unequivocal in his condemnation of Agamben's ahistorical analysis of sovereignty and biopolitics, to some extent his own consideration of sovereignty suggests that the process is generalizable to community formation: that, so to speak, each specific community's ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny – a pattern which will persist until there is some historical break in the thinking of community such as through the affirmative biopolitics espoused by Esposito, wherein the natural outgrowth of community formation which is the accretion of power to an individual leader must be cut off or dissolved before it calcifies or turns cancerous.

As we have seen, the city of Dhalgren has undergone a separation from the rest of society. However, the old means of social organization linger, and there are a number of communities within the novel. There is, of course, the Richards family, holed up in their apartment with their belongings, foolishly worried about the legality of taking electricity from the common hallway. Though this is a family, not a community, it is representative

of the logic of immunity. But there are also a number of non-familial communities, both planned and organic. This includes the commune in the park, the group of religious devotees who have coalesced around Reverend Amy Taylor, and the pleasure seekers and sycophants who attend Roger Calkins at his estate. When Kidd first meets the commune members, including the leaders John and Milly, they explain to him that in their commune, “People get food, work together, know they have some sort of protection” (25). This definition of their commune is in keeping with what might be considered the guiding principles of the archetypal 60’s commune: shared food and shared work. However, the commune in the park, or “John’s group” as it is sometimes called, belies the fundamentally conservative – or at least non-revolutionary – historical practice of the majority of 60’s experiments in communal living. The sentence quoted above begins to reveal the immunitarian nature of the group with the final clause regarding protection, something for which they enlist the local gang. John and Milly go on to say, apparently without any sense of irony, “We don’t take in everybody. But when we do, we’re very accepting.” The essence of their community, then, is not in their shared food and work, but in the boundaries they draw between themselves and other Bellonan residents. But these divisions perniciously extend even among members of the commune, whether they are cognizant of them or not, as each member is still an individual without private property and private space. Moreover, these individual members default back to the comfortable position of ceding their own authority to a leader, John, who functions as a mini-sovereign, a failing that characterized a whole host of communitarian groups in the 1960’s from the Merry Pranksters, with their reliance upon the leadership of Ken Kesey, to Charles Manson’s Family.

Given the traditional foundations of the community, it is then maybe unsurprising that the purportedly radical aspects of the group prove to be just a gloss and incapable of holding the group together for long. The illusion of the usefulness of such approaches is made more tenuous by the Bellonan context, in which much of the outside world's conventions – such as work – are no longer relevant. As the character Tak observes of the group, "You people want me to work too hard. You just refuse to understand that work for its own sake is something I see no virtue in at all" (34). All work in Bellona, because conditions change daily, upsetting or destroying the work that has been done, and because food and shelter is for the taking and money has no value, must be work for its own sake. The commune residents have not reached the understanding that Kidd has, and as we will see, the Scorpions gang has, of the futility of work in Bellona. Like the elevator operator, actress, and others mentioned in the opening passage of the novel, they are continuing to identify themselves solely through their status as workers. When Kidd, much later in the narrative, returns to the park, he finds the group has disappeared, the members having dispersed to pursue their own individualistic aims, much like the fate of the American Romantics who could not reconcile their individualist emphasis with communitarian values.

The problems posed by this primary conflict between the individual and the community were ones with which Bataille grappled. Jean-Luc Nancy, in his influential Bataillean study, *The Inoperative Community*, argues that the years leading up to World War II led to a break in Bataille's thought regarding community. Bataille became disillusioned with communism, which in its practice destroyed the sovereignty of the individual. At the same time, he was horrified by the proliferation of pre-war fascism,

which was community gone mad. These realizations in Bataille's thought prompted an awakening that led to the revision of his previous philosophy of community.

Community is the locus of thought in Bataille's post-war work *Eroticism*. The themes of taboo and transgression have made the book notorious, and they are essentially communitarian concepts. A community is a community only by virtue of the prohibitions, contained within every norm: while held in common, these serve to insulate individuals from one another. (Esposito's immunitarian paradigm is another way of stating this.) Through various means, these prohibitions create the conditions constraining individuals to perceive each other as discontinuous beings. They are also the foundation of science because they "removed the object of the taboo from our consciousness by forbidding it, and at the same time deprived our consciousness ...of the movement of terror whose consequence was the taboo" (38). This was "necessary for the clarity, the untroubled clarity, of the world of action and of objectivity" and was the ground of the realm of rationality, which thereby also allowed man to "buil[d] up the rational world by his own efforts" through work, and "hence the human collective, partly dedicated to work, is defined by taboos without which it would not have become the world of work that it essentially is" (40-1). These bounds of prohibitions and the world of work they found stabilize both community and individuality in their reciprocal relationship.

In this reading, community and individuality are irrevocably tied to the preservation of normative society in such a way that change would seem to be impossible – in the best-case scenario. In the worst, the only change that makes rational sense is that which involves the continual layering of human society with more norms and prohibitions, more divisions, in order to create safe, tight-knit communities which guard

against the other and guarantee the security of the individual in order to work ceaselessly for his or her own benefit. How does one curtail the seemingly ceaseless drive towards normativization and immunization? From where come the radical explosions which light up the sky like the solar anus of Bataille or the swollen red sun of *Dhalgren*, and how do these moments of the sacred reconstruct both the individual and the community?

As noted, most Bataillean critics agree that there was a post-war shift in Bataille's thinking of community, evidenced not only by his disillusionment with communism and his horror at fascism, but also by his abandonment of the secret society Acéphale. However, they differ in their opinions regarding the significance of this shift. Nancy and Alphonso Lingis, in his essay "Contact and Communication," propose that Bataille substitutes communication for community. Community problematically sublates the sovereign individual into a greater totality, whereas, according to Nancy, the being-in-communication is being-outside-itself, which is not a state of sublation. Lingis states that Bataille "separates the notion of communication from that of commonality or communion" and that communication "designates the contact of an individual with what is and remains beyond him," but still requires "sovereign moments in individuals" (121). For Chris Gemerchak, in "Of Goods and Things: Reflections on an Ethics of Community," the problem of community is a utilitarian, materialistic one. He lays out his interpretation of the central paradox of a Bataillean ethics: how can you have an ethics predicated on loss (nonproductive expenditure, inner experience, etc.) which avoids the recuperation of this loss into gain, if not for the individual then for the community (69)? This corresponds to Bataille's idea of a morality of the summit which emphasizes communication and experience versus a morality of decline which is based upon servile

and utilitarian values. All three of the critics mentioned above – Nancy, Lingis, and Gemerchak – despite their differences, believe Bataille comes to see community as corrupt and posits the individual and the process of individuation as constituting a blockage to communication.

These critics, however, are too hasty in their dismissal of community and individuality. Bataille does begin to attend to the radical potential inherent in communication in his post-war writings, but he does not entirely give up the notion of community nor view the individual as a blockage. It is rather that he wants to rewrite both of these in terms of communication – in such a way that the community and the individual become similar process-formations. Of being (or the individual) he states that "the unity which you are flees from you and escapes…What you are stems from the activity which links the innumerable elements which constitute you to the intense communication of these elements of among themselves. These are contagions of energy…" (*Inner Experience* 94). From the inner heterogeneous composition of the individual being, he proceeds to the group:

> "[Y]our life is not limited to that ungraspable inner streaming; it streams to the outside as well and opens itself incessantly to what flows out or surges forth towards it. The lasting vortex which constitutes you runs up against similar vortexes with which it forms a vast figure animate by a measure agitation."

Instead, communication is always an instance of bursting through the boundaries of community such that a new community and a new individual may be formed in the wake of these experiences, though of course, both the new community and the new individuals

themselves must eventually be destroyed or left behind. Neither the community nor the individual will ever be stable, but this is not to say that we need give up thinking through the ramifications of communication for them, as these critics seem to do. Additionally, the critics who argue for a privileged positioning of communication in post-war Bataillean philosophy possess a peculiar blindness towards the various means of communication, exhibiting a tacit preference for language. While language's efficiency for communication is not to be denied – although in the framework of disruptive communication Bataille theorizes, it might be more appropriate to underscore its inefficiency – bodily contact is also a form of communication. As we will see, both forms of communication are sites of the sacred in *Dhalgren*.

What we need instead is a model of community which is based upon what Esposito calls an "affirmative biopolitics," one that pays heed to both community and the individual. Unlike the other proponents of an affirmative biopolitics, namely Hardt and Negri, Esposito acknowledges that the individual is always in conflict with the community. There are ways to circumvent, or perhaps dialectically overcome, such conflict, but you cannot entirely evade it. You must address it, move through it, ultimately passing beyond the rule of God and Hobbesian law, before you can establish another form of community. This affirmative biopolitics "can only emerge, however, if one simultaneously develops a conception of life that is aporetically exposed to others in such a way that the individual escapes an immunization of the self (and hence is no longer an individual proper)" (xxix). The individual only belongs to a community to the extent that he or she exposes himself or herself. Moreover, to pick up the thread that runs through sovereignty, property, and liberty, it is the *body* which is "the primary site of

property" (65). The individual *is* a body and *has* a body, constituting a self-relation in the form of *personal identity* (66). As such, the body is both the object around which the greatest immunitarian anxieties revolve and the potential source for the most radical of intersubjective experiences.

Esposito himself does not describe a working model of affirmative biopolitics. There is, however, a community represented in *Dhalgren*, the Scorpions gang, which seems to be founded on something like an affirmative biopolitics, though from a summary description of it, this might not be apparent. The term "gang" alone most likely disconcerts the average reader, given its powerfully negative connotations. But the Scorpions – aimless, destructive, and violent though they may be – occupy a central place in the latter half of the narrative. It is maybe unsurprising, then, that Kid's time spent with the gang is the most heavily autobiographical aspect of the novel. Delany spent the fall and winter of 1967-1968, thus directly prior to the writing of *Dhalgren*, living in a New York City commune called Heavenly Breakfast (which was also the name of the rock band several commune members played in). His lightly fictionalized memoirs based upon this experience were published in 1979 as *Heavenly Breakfast*. There are a number of scenes in *Dhalgren* which are clearly modeled upon events which are recounted in the memoirs – most frequently Delany's sexual encounters in the commune. More strikingly, Heavenly Breakfast, though not named, is referenced as part of Kid's former life, his life before Bellona: "I spent December, January, February and March in three rooms on East Second Street in New York with about ten guys and ten chicks. Cold as a motherfucker, and we were in there *all* day. All we did is eat, ball, and deal dope: Nicest time of my life" (574). There are a few aspects of the context in which this memory is raised which

should be noted. The first is that Lanya, to whom he is speaking, asks him how the Scorpions gang compares to the New York experience, and he replies: “This is *not* the nicest time in my life” (574). This is maybe puzzling, as on the surface it would seem to contradict any claims of the gang as radical community paradigm. However, I would argue that “nicest” should be read as an ironic characterization. Of course, Kid’s time with the Scorpion gang is not “nice.” It is hard to envision a “nice” sacred community. Instead what this ironic comparison signals is a commitment on Delany’s part to think beyond even Heavenly Breakfast, already radical by any contemporary norms.

The other significant aspect of this passage is that Kid recounts this experience as evidence that collective living does not necessarily infringe upon an individual’s desire for privacy: “that’s a funny thing about privacy. If there’re two or three people in a room, it’s really hard to be by yourself. If there’re nine or ten, especially if you’re all living together, if you want to be alone, all you have to do is think I want to be alone and everybody else has somebody to pay attention to, and you’re alone.” This reflection can be usefully contrasted with Kid’s observation about June Richards, mentioned earlier. June’s personal space is inviolable, a boundary of individuality that is only broken with the most transgressive of actions, her sexual encounter with George. (There is some question as to whether this was an instance of rape or of one of mutual desire which was framed as rape to cover over the shocking possibility that a young white woman could desire a black man. In the context of this discussion, it does not matter – either alternative is still predicated upon a radical transgressing of norms necessary to break through her tightly guarded personal space.) June enacts the immunitarian defense of the individual pitted against the community. Kid’s observation about communal living, however,

demonstrates that the individual may retain some sense of privacy even in the context of being-in-common – though the truly radical implication contained within is that this individual is no longer an "individual proper," as Esposito put it, according to our standards of individuality.

Life within the Scorpions gang begins to display its revolutionary potential through the gang's utter disregard for private property. They go on "runs," which are essentially looting sprees – although what meaning can looting have in the context of a city in which daily life has been so altered? Kid's first run after he joins the group occurs at the same time as the sun, in a quintessentially sci-fi plot convention, grows to hundreds of times its original proportions. The newly-massive sun is reminiscent of the one described in Bataille's short essay, "Rotten Sun": "If…one obstinately focuses on it, a certain madness is implied, and the notion changes meaning because it is no longer production that appears in light, but refuse or combustion" (*Visions* 57). The "blinding brilliance" and elevation of the sun transforms into a fall into "unheard-of violence" (58). The sun in *Dhalgren* is described – in strong symbolic resonances with Bataille's own work – by the Reverend Taylor as "God's womb punched inside out and blazing with Her blood, looking like a moment ago She had passed the egg of the earth" (470). The growth of the sun in *Dhalgren* precipitates a wild run by the Scorpions. Through his heightened awareness of imminent disaster and possible death, Kidd realizes, "Perhaps, he thought, we are all going to die in moments, obscured by flame and pain. That is why this. And then, perhaps we are not. That is why this in this way" (434). In the liminal space between life and death, the only action which makes (non)sense is violent destruction, the antithesis of production.

Later, when June Richards arrives and finds her lost older brother among the Scorpions, she begs him to come home and asks what it is they do in the gang that he finds so appealing (568-9). He describes the runs with some truth and some half-truth, the half-truth apparently for his sister's – or his own – benefit. Food is not the purpose of the runs, unless one is starving, possibly because it is too utilitarian. He claims the Scorpions take items they would like to have, but June points out that the Scorpions in fact own very little, at which point Kid interrupts to say that on the runs, "We break things…Mainly. And if there're people around who don't like it, we rough them up." Eddy offers a further explanation of his desire to remain in the gang which relies on the popular myth of a gang's familial nature. Eddy's speech infuriates Kid. Though he does not explain why, we can infer that the hierarchy and purpose of such a structure is not in line with Kid's own sense of the group, and is instead a displacement from Eddy's abandoned bourgeois life. Kid's own final word on the subject of the gang runs comes a moment later in a private reflection: "Why do we make runs? Kid thought: Because if we didn't we'd be a little more crazy than we are now" (571). The runs are both a sign of the brink of madness and a stop-gap measure against even greater madness.

In place of the hierarchy that is inherent in the familial structure – and the state and normative community structure – the radical community in *Dhalgren* could be said to model itself on Bataille's figure of *Acéphale.* The head has been cut off, the organs are exposed, the stars of heaven, or the summit, now come to rest upon man's chest, and death's skull stands upon the pubis. The loss of the head symbolizes not only the abdication of reason, but the abdication of the king, head of state or fascist leader. This body is both the sacrificial victim who ensures the cohesion of the community and a

member of the community – which is to say, every member of the community is a sacrificial victim. The universality of the position, the fact that it applies to all members of the community, complicates or even negates the meaning of the term victim.

How does the acephalic body function? That is, how does one assume the position of the sacrificial victim, the body that is aporetically exposed? In a passage in Dhalgren, Kid states that he *"has* been able to grasp and strip from the body of experience….layers of living thesis" (523). This living thesis is unqualified, but I believe we can look to Delany's *Heavenly Breakfast,* his account of communal living mentioned previously, for the beginning some clues as to what this living thesis might be, specifically in a passage in which he addresses the sexual component of life in a commune:

> In a communal situation bisexuality has to be of at least passing interest to everyone. (That's assuming both sexes are represented.) The standard bohemian/liberal education teaches you quickly not to take offense at someone else's desire. If it pleases you, you move toward it; if not, you sidestep politely as your individual temperament allows. At the Breakfast I learned to move within the circle of other people's desire, and be at ease as I generated my own. And I would strike one of my senses before I would part with that knowledge. (20)

The force field generating and receiving sexual desire is reminiscent, of course, of Freud's polymorphous perversity, wherein children have not yet had their sexuality codified. Polymorphous perversity is a tantalizing component of Freudian theory, as it seems to open up space for something other than normative behavior: children "exhibit no disgust at excreta," "attach no special importance to the distinction between the

sexes," "direct their first sexual lusts…to those who are nearest," "show…that they expect to derive pleasure not only from their sexual organs, but that many other parts of the body lay claim to the same sensitivity" (Freud 259). However, such polymorphous perversity proves disappointing because, as described by Freud, it is eventually overturned in the psyche by society and, at its root, is still very self-interested. The communal conception of sexuality which Delany describes does not solely involve a subject gaining pleasure from any object. Rather, one is always potentially both a subject and an object. I believe one can equally usefully apply Bataille's notion of general economy to this communal conception of sexuality. Restricted economy, it bears repeating, is the complete instrumentalization of life, whereas general economy is the total non-productive expenditure of energies and goods. Through this total expenditure, one finds oneself spent in communication with the other, and the differences between subject and object disappear.

Through a general economy of the body the act of love becomes similar to the act of sacrifice. As Bataille remarks in *Erotism*:

> Both [acts] reveal the flesh. Sacrifice replaces the ordered life of the animal with a blind convulsion of its organs. So also with the erotic convulsion…The urges of the flesh pass all bounds in the absence of controlling will. Flesh is the extravagance within us set up against the law of decency. Flesh is the born enemy of people haunted by Christian taboos, but if as I believe an indefinite and general taboo does exist, opposed to sexual liberty in ways depending on the time and the place, the flesh signifies a return to this threatening freedom. (92)

Kid is the general economist of the body par excellence. It is not simply his willingness to bed whoever shows an interest in him, though the importance of that position cannot be denied – he has released his "controlling will," maybe even having gone beyond Delany's proposition in *Heavenly Breakfast* to move toward an object if it pleases you and sidestep it if it does not. The lesson learned in Delany's commune experience tacitly acknowledges that all subjects in the nonfictional world have accumulated patterns of desire, but suggests that we take as relaxed an approach to that as possible. However, in this fictional world, he is able to create an individual who has jettisoned the weight of his socialized sexual desire and has achieved a pure openness, a sexuality which knows no bounds.

As Kid himself observes, this opens up the individual to a sense of the infinite. When Kid is lying in bed after a *ménage* à *trois* with Lanya and Denny, another member of the Scorpions, he feels himself physically drawn to Lanya again: "His penis lowered toward Lanya's thigh. It is not touching her, he thought. Then, the slightest warmth. And pressure. It is touching her. Eyes wide, he rolled back, trying to understand by blunt reason that terrifying and marvelous transition" (583). This contact is the vertiginous touch of eroticism. Kid then countenances his own finitude, while seeing the infinite, or in Bataillean terms, the continuousness between beings covered over by daily existence, open up before him: "I am limited, finite, and fixed. I am in terror of the infinity before me."

This infinity and absence of fixed identity presents a danger to the individual, but one must not immunize oneself against it. It requires constant exposure, the aporetic exposure recommended by Esposito. "Aporetic" means both at a loss and with doubt:

one operates at a loss in a general economy, and the doubt is the uncertainty inherent when you offer yourself up to other human beings without guarantee of how you will be treated in return; but one may also conceive of this kernel of doubt as the condition which requires a sort of Kiekegaardian leap to faith – not to God, but to other human individuals. The gravitational push and pull inherent in the tides of identity-formation and community-formation which is dependent upon such exposure is a process of continuous creation and destruction. Inherent in the practice of exposure is a capacity to *let go*: of immunity and security, of the comfortably familiar, of the narratives we tell about others and ourselves, of all that gives us stability and meaning. Though the loss which accompanies this letting go exudes a whiff of the tragic, but in what sense?

A comparison of Kid with Bron, the protagonist from *Triton* (re-issued later as *Trouble on Triton*) is illustrative. *Trouble on Triton*, published a year after *Dhalgren*, is in some ways its sister novel. It features a world in which, similar to *Dhalgren*, almost no norms can be said to obtain – although in *Trouble on Triton* it is not catastrophe but advanced technology which creates this situation. Within this world lives Bron, stubbornly heteronormative, angry, and alienated. His relationships are a series of failures brought on by his misapprehension of others and of himself, and his attempts to join in the community on Triton and to, in a bit of a parody of the heteronormative romance genre, "win the girl of his dreams," including undergoing a gender-reassignment surgery, indicate not only a mistaken assumption of the equivalence of appearance and essence, but also an inability to participate in the flow of identity-formation that rules in Triton society. The novel is a critique of the possibilities for self-fashioning (and I use that term advisedly) immanent in technological advancement, and I cannot do justice here

to the complexity of that critique. It is left ambiguous, for example, whether it is only Bron who confuses appearance and essence, a maladjusted individual in the context of a more liberated society, someone "not made for this world," so to speak, or if he is one of the few individuals who sense, consciously or otherwise, the paradoxes and quandaries of the situation in which he lives, who is expressing in a more tortured fashion the same existential crisis that other individuals must either confront or bury. Regardless of the irresolvability of this dilemma – which also impedes any anagnorisis for Bron – it is clear that Bron's angst and sorrow is due, in part, to his inability to adapt and to achieve some sort of ecstatic inner experience and intersubjective communication.

Kid's problem is the antithesis of Bron's. The anguish which burns within him is the unavoidable consequence of the series of ecstatic encounters he has. The situation of living as exposed entails that one's position is never fixed within the structure of a stable community – or, more definitively, there are no fixed positions and there are no stable communities. The individual always has one foot in the crowd, so to speak, as in the dream Deleuze and Guattari recount in *A Thousand Plateaus*: "I am on the edge of the crowd, at the periphery; but I belong to it, I am attached to it by one of my extremities, a hand or foot." (29). The figure of Kidd, with one shoed foot and one bare foot, is the perfect emblem for this liminal position.

Would it be too much of a stretch to suggest that this very liminal position is an apt description of Delany's own oeuvre and the uneasy status it occupies, floating between popular genre fiction and literary fiction? The question of Delany's writing brings us back around to the issue of communication. How does writing – both the representation of it in the novel and the novel itself as an artifact of writing – constitute

what might be called Bataillean communication? Bataille grants to language an ambiguous and vacillating power. Writing "alone is capable of bringing us to the level of signification. Without it, everything is incrementally lost in equivalence" (USN 234). One must "insist" upon the phrase in order to fix meaning. But at the same time, writing "is also capable of calling us into torrents so rapid that nothing is recovered. It abandons us to the vertigo of oblivion." The vertigo of oblivion that Bataille refers to is one of those Bataillean concepts that, across the breadth of his writings, can be variously interpreted as death, the infinite, continuity of being, and eroticism.

Dhalgren is a study of, among so many other things, an author. Kid writes to fix his own identity, to capture the experience of witnessing death, to stave off the passage of time, to stoke passion…In a world in which he practices exposure to others, and in which he spurns instrumental thought, it might be construed as a private, utilitarian act, a preserve of individuality against the encroachment of the public and a means of solidifying one's knowledge. In "The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade," Bataille suggests that poetry could be a method of excretory heterology, but that it, like religion, is debased since it often leads onto the "path of a total poetic conception of the world, which ends at any one of a number of aesthetic homogeneities." ("Use Value"). The tension between the possibilities held forth by writing and the frequent disappointment of its manifestation is returned to again and again by Bataille. He wants to make an argument for poetic language's potential, but runs up against the reality of its practice, in which poetic forms, assimilated into tradition, become ossified and instrumental. Revolutionary poetic language, to the contrary, is not appropriative. Instead, it "leads to the same place as all forms of eroticism – to the blending and fusion of separate objects. It leads us to eternity,

it leads us to death, and through death to continuity. Poetry is eternity; the sun matched with the sea" (*Erotism* 25).

In Dhalgren, the path from poetry to the experience of eroticism is gained as Kid's writing is also exposed. He harbors no sense of propriety regarding his work or others': for example, the notebook he writes in contains someone else's writing (writing which mirrors the beginning of the novel). Or rather, it might be someone else's writing and it might also be the amnesiac Kid's – regardless, by the end of the novel, the two have merged. His journal, left about, is picked up and read by friends and strangers. The act of writing itself is also depicted by Delany in an uncommon manner: we are provided with descriptions of Kid grabbing sheets of paper, scribbling, crossing out sections; and we are given descriptions of his hands opening his journals, holding his pen, how he sits when he writes, where he is.

Writing is a confrontation with death, a struggle against time. When Kid confronts death, as he does when the red sun suddenly balloons, he feels the urge to write: "I may be dead, he though, in…seconds, minutes, hours? He squinted at the brilliant arc, already perhaps thirty houses wide. The thought came with absurd coolness, I'm going to write something" (420). Writing approaches the limits of existence and knowledge, their mutual summit, as when he attempts to describe the corpse of the Richards' son: writing and re-writing a phrase which describes the corpse, he realizes that "the first conception had only approached the bearable limit" and that his reworkings are "far more horrifying than what he had intended to describe" (242). The description crosses into what Bataille would call the impossible or the sacred. The sacred instant in literature, according to Bataille, is "a privileged moment of communal unity, a moment of the convulsive

communication of what is ordinarily stifled" ("The Sacred" 242). The fragmentary nature of Kid's writing, and by extension, Delany's, since there is a strong metafictional overlap between Kid's notebook and the novel, is a result of its shattering before these limits.

However, like the incessant activity of community and individual formation, one cannot give up the activity of writing. Late in the novel, Kid reflects on how writing:

> convinced him magic was in process that would return to him…some of what the city had squandered. The conviction was now identified by its fraudulence, before the inadequate objects. But as it died, kicking in his gut, spastic and stuttering, he knew it had been as real and unquestioned as any surround: air to a bird, water to a fish, earth to a worm. He was exhausted, with an exhaustion that annihilated want. And all he could conceive of wanting was to try again; to make more poems, to put them in a book, to have that book made real by reproduction, and give that hallucination another chance! (499-500)

Kid's insights follow the classic schema of Lacanian desire, though here as the relationship between the subject and a city: there is a lack in the city which causes the subject to endeavor to reproduce his desire again and again. Though Bataille doesn't deal with compulsion as such, this writing process is, much like the practice of eroticism, one of a general economy. What is implied in the passage from *Dhalgren* quoted above is that a straight-forward utopian (or conversely, dystopian) recuperation of the world, rationally worked out and described through writing in what amounts to an aesthetic homogeneity, is a futile proposition.

This, I would argue, is why *Dhalgren* is not exactly a representative model of an affirmative biopolitics. The Scorpions gang is not a perfect community, nor is Bellona, by any means, a city wrecked by destruction but offering revolutionary hope. But neither does *Dhalgren* ominously prophesize the conditions that will result from practicing nonexpenditure and general economy. Instead, the novel itself lies exposed, the raw optic nerve of vision, offering not a solution but the model of a practice, which will necessarily be fragmented and contingent.

CHAPTER 4

AT THE FRONTIERS OF ART AND SCIENCE: TABOO AND TRANSGRESSION IN BIOART

Bioart is a small, but growing field at the intersection of art and science. "Artistic laboratories" have produced artworks such as the "Victimless Leather" project, in which leather is grown with mouse cells and human bone cells; bioluminescent tropical scenes, which to my eye for kitsch look very similar to black velvet paintings; GFP or Green Fluorescent Protein bunnies; audio files of cell vibrations played over speakers; the artist Stelarc's performances with a robotic third arm or robotic spider legs; and others. These artworks are created using technologies such as artificially generated DNA, live tissue cultures, and grafts and transplants. Much of this might sound like it is lifted from the pages of a science fiction novel, perhaps one of those lunatic projects of Dr. Benway's, one which never made it into the published version of *Naked Lunch*. In fact, though, for a certain strain of bioart, the ultimate artistic and ethical goal is for a communal practice involving the very bodies of the participants which would encourage a merging of Self and Other and would fit more appropriately within the narrative of *Dhalgren* – or the closest analogues might be the Cinema of Transgression movement or Acéphale, the secret society Bataille founded. But bioart is not science fiction. Rather it marks a move from the register of fictional representation to that of the living, biological world. If *Naked Lunch* describes the madness of the society based upon restricted economy against which the heterogeneous body tragically stands out, while *Dhalgren* provides a vision of a heterotopic site at which a community practicing general economy may be formed, then bioart attempts to critique one of the pillars of support for the biopolitical state, the life

sciences, and promote living practices which counter the ideological effect of biopower. As we will see, however, due to bioart's dependence upon the knowledge and technological apparatus of the very object of its critique, often it perpetuates the very ideological mystification which it sets out to dispel.

This mystification is generated through the life sciences' unwarranted – or at least only semi-warranted – claims regarding its own power to fully articulate what it means to be human: the insistence by modern psychiatry that the mind is only a special effect generated by the physical processes of the brain; the suggestions from genetics research that all of our behaviors are encoded and hard-wired in our genome; the teleological claims of evolutionary psychology, perhaps the most ideologically suspect of any of the life sciences, that we are the ultimate embodiment of tens of thousands of years of natural selection, every possible trait selected for; and so on. It is not the truth or lack thereof of these claims which is significant – though even their truth may be called into question. Rather, their significance lies in the engendering of a belief in the terminal comprehensibility of the human on the basis of its material substrate and the promulgation of the scientific approach to the human as an object of study.

This might seem to be a competing rationale to that of *homo œconomicus*. But these two understandings of the human work in tandem to facilitate the continued advance of the economic and social rationale of restricted economy. Restricted economy was first theorized by French philosopher Georges Bataille, to put it in Nietzschean terms Bataille would recognize, is the economy of life for "the last man" and represents the peak of the post-Enlightenment instrumentalization of all dimensions of life for the purposes of material production and consumption and the quantification of all aspects of

this process. The life sciences today participate in this instrumentalization. I will argue that the field of bioart is bifurcated between art which is complicit with this rationale, even amplifying its authority through artworks which ask us to stand in awe of technology or scientific knowledge, and more libidinal or transgressive works which attempt to interrogate some of our deepest taboos regarding the sanctity of the human body and the preservation of the difference between the human and the animal, the animate and the inanimate.

Before turning to bioart itself, I feel it is important to give a general overview of the philosophical critique of science's, particularly the life sciences', explanatory authority. Because a generous portion of the world's population – even within American culture – is uneducated in science and because science is so often a contentious issue in American politics, particularly for what is colloquially known as the "religious right," with their vociferous opposition to global warming and evolution, among other issues, it is difficult to present a critique of science without garnering the label of reactionary. Nevertheless, it is incumbent upon us to investigate the power science has over our lives and the peculiar unquestioning faith – a faith that is nearly equivalent to that of the most zealous of religious adherents – a great number of individuals have in it.

This faith can be understood as the inevitable consequence of what Adorno and Horkheimer, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which is in part a critique of scientific rationality, describe as the troubled process of Enlightenment. Enlightenment seeks to dispel myth and to conquer fear through the triumph of the rational. But in Englightenment "what human beings seek to learn from nature is how to use it to dominate wholly both it and human beings. Nothing else counts. Ruthless toward itself,

the Enlightenment has eradicated the last remnant of its own self-awareness" (2). In fact, Enlightenment often shares aspects with the very myth it seeks to dispel, primarily through what might be called the irrationality of its domination. As Enlightenment remakes all knowledge, it reduces nature from a substance replete with qualities to quantifiable, classifiable material: “It is the identity of mind and its correlative, the unity of nature, which subdues the abundance of qualities. Nature, stripped of qualities, becomes the chaotic stuff of mere classification, and the all-powerful self becomes a mere having, an abstract identity" (6). Anything outside of this, if there can be an outside, anything “which does not conform to the standard of calculability and utility,” must then be regarded with “suspicion” (3). The inverse of this suspicion toward what lies outside calculability is the faith that is put in science (and later I will describe how this faith takes on aspects of fetishization).

Why, though, do the life sciences especially prompt this faith which will become fetishization? Though the life sciences appear quite similar to other contemporary fields of knowledge, they occupy an unusual position. Unlike other hard sciences, they take the human as their object of study. Unlike the liberal arts, which study aspects of human culture, they apply scientific methods to their human object of study (although the liberal arts, for a variety of reasons but primarily to garner funding and hang on to their meager roles in higher education, have increasingly modeled themselves upon the sciences). Positioned at this juncture, the life sciences purport to have a special insight into the human and presume an absolute identity between their object of study (humans) and their knowledge of it. With the powers of science at their disposal, the scientists claim they are able to locate and describe the essence of what it means to be human. The assumption

underlying this is, of course, the complete identity between the material substrate of our being with whatever might be said to emanate from our mind, what R. C. Lewontin, a critic of the life sciences, calls the "ideology of biological determinism." (If we have ever had reason to sustain rather than attempt to reconcile the Cartesian split between mind and body, it is this.)

If it is the tendency of the Enlightenment to subjugate nature, to dominate it and force it through the conceptual sieves of quantification and classification at the expense of its qualia, this is even more pernicious within the field of the life sciences. As the life sciences continue in their quest to map every square millimeter of the human body, to record down to the minute the timeline of the human body, as the old classical fields of biology, botany, and economy, have become more specialized, offering up new fields such as bioinformatics, computational neuroscience, genomics, pharmacogenomics, systems biology, and so forth, the totalizing project grows ever bolder in its assertion that there lies nothing outside of this material substrate.

Though the authority of the life sciences seems pervasive and uncontested, there have been detractors from within both the field of critical theory and, maybe surprisingly, from within the field of the life sciences itself. Within critical theory, the critique of the life sciences may be traced to Bachelard's writings on science. Prior to Bachelard, there is a fairly strong and visible tradition of a critique of science in French philosophy, beginning with Comte, but it is Bachelard who proved most influential to 20th-century critiques of science in French theory, including those of Canguilhem, Althusser, and Foucault. After having studied the history of science, Bachelard's first radical step is to historicize reason itself – he argues that because there are differing scientific rationalities

across the span of history, then there must be historically-contingent rationalities. In any given period of scientific history, seemingly *a priori* limitations turn out not to be objective limitations at all, but limitations on man's own part. These epistemological obstacles are often overcome, leading to epistemological breaks between two scientific conceptualizations.

After Bachelard, other French theorists were capable of further historicizing and problematizing science. I would like to lay out a few areas of concern which some of these theorists touch on and draw some tentative connections to biopower. Though Foucault was Canguilhem's student, I will begin with first with his broad characterization of the role of Nature in the natural and life sciences and the historic transformation in epistemic orientation. This is related to Canguilhem's tracing out of the way in which the relationship between the organism and its milieu has been portrayed in the life sciences over the past few hundred years, a relationship that in today's modern formulation is represented in the Nature vs. Nurture debate. As we will see, many of Foucault and Canguilhem's assertions are echoed by the principal critic of the life sciences positioned within the field itself, R.C. Lewontin.

Canguilhem's research informed Foucault's theorization of the transformation from the Classical field of natural history to that of the modern field of biology which he discusses in *The Order of Things*. In this work, Foucault argues that prior to biology there was a field of knowledge which posited "Nature" as a natural order which was discoverable through variables of superficial traits. This Nature is a sweeping continuum; the entities belonging to it had physical characteristics which were often distinguished by size or shape. Jonathan Crary takes up this position and provides further

support to in his work *Techniques of the Observer* when he states that “the eighteenth-century observer confronts a unified space of order, unmodified by his or her own sensory and physiological apparatus, on which the contents of the world can be studied and compared, known in terms of a multitude of relationships” (55). But with the start of modern biology, function took precedence. All difference was perceived only in contrast to the background of similar significant functions.

Foucault characterizes the change from classical taxonomy to modern biology in the following:

> “[Classical taxonomy] was constructed entirely upon the basis of the four variables of description (forms, number, arrangement, magnitude), which could be scanned...by language and by the eye; and in this deployment of the visible, life appeared as the effect of a patterning process -- a mere classifying boundary. From Cuvier onward, it is life in its non-perceptible, purely functional aspect that provides the basis for the exterior possibility of a classification.” (268)

This means, for Foucault, that "Nature" also disappears. Nature was "a homogeneous space of orderable identities and differences"; now the possibility of classification "arises from the depths of life." The space is opened up to depth. Spatial discontinuity is important to modern biology. And the breaking up of space "made it possible to reveal a historicity proper to life itself: that of its maintenance in its conditions of existence" (275).

The transition Foucault marks from natural history to modern biology has significant implications for the construction of an ideology of the life sciences. First,

there is a clear intensification of efforts to quantify the materials of nature, including living entities. The breaking up of all of the natural order into discrete quanta reduces or even precludes entirely understandings of the entity as a whole organism, something Canguilhem also notes and characterizes as a discipline-specific problem: that it improper to conceive of the living organism as a quantity of discrete units responding to the discrete units of stimuli. Here, the lessons of *Gestalttheorie* are instructive: it is necessary to think of the organism itself as whole, irreducible to its singular parts (110). Moreover, as Foucault points out, the underlying principle by which the qualities of the entities are separated into these quanta is that of function. The reduction to quanta based on function is akin to the process by which units of currency come to stand for the properties inherent in use-value in order to facilitate exchange. The quantification of the human in one field of knowledge, that of the life sciences, can only help to facilitate similar quantification through biopower and its correlative of neoliberal economics. Additionally there is the move to the study of the invisible domain, as the object of science recedes to a horizon beyond the scope of unaided human perception. What we believe to be there but cannot see or hear holds power over us as it *demands* our faith, and the intermediaries who grant us access to that realm possess the authority of mediums or soothsayers.

Georges Canguilhem's influence on Foucault includes his idea of the "life of relation," which became part of Foucault's notion of the spatialization of biology and Canguilhem's observation of a switch from studying functions apparent "in the external milieu" to studying the internal milieu, from visible aspects to hidden ones. But it is Canguilhem's discussion of milieu, taken up again in another essay "The Living and its Milieu," which interests me. Here, Canguilhem considers the historical importation of the

term *milieu* from mechanics to biology, and this historical analysis allows for a broad view of the development of the scientific understanding, not yet complete, of what Canguilhem calls the "dialectic" between the living organism and its milieu (102). The term in its original mechanistic conception designated the medium between two bodies which allowed one body to act upon the other (interestingly, this original non-biological conception contains the germ of the eventual dialectical conception, though it would be suppressed for a long period). But this exchange or reciprocity of organism and environment has not been the standard for understanding living entities; instead, what we have is the traditionally antagonistic confrontation as conveyed through the idea of "nature vs. nurture."

Thus a certain blindness to the organism's singularity and biological autonomy persists. Canguilhem draws broad and provocative parallels between modern geography, or biogeography as he calls it, animal ethology and the study of phototropism, and eventually behaviorist psychology to explain a persistent denial of any biological autonomy of the individual which leads to a belief in ultimate mechanism or determinism. He looks at Ritter and Humboldt's "idea of determining historical relations by the geographical substrate was consolidated in geography...doing history came to consist in reading a map," calling this the bio-geographic: the map is treated as akin to a milieu; both are deterministic or mechanistic (107). This treatment of the human, Canguilhem states, was doubled by one in the area of animal ethology: "The mechanistic explanation of the organism's movements in the milieu succeeded the mechanistic interpretation of the formation of organic forms" (108). The reflex of phototropism founds the idea that "all movement of the organism [is] movement forced on it by the

milieu." From here, he is able to turn to behaviorist psychology. Because "[t]here is a physical determinism in the relation between excitation and response" behavior is reduced to neurology. This reflects a move from "a conception that simply neglects consciousness as useless" to "one that nullifies it as illusory." The milieu becomes all-powerful.

Slightly subsequent in historical development to the trend in thought which regards the milieu as all-powerful (such as in neurology) is the reversal of this position in genetics. The opposing view as it develops in the creation of genetics is the idea that of genetic determinism and a belief of the "autonomy of the living in relation to the milieu," in which "the acquisition by the living being of its form and, hence, its function depends, in a given milieu, on its own hereditary potential and that the milieu's action on the phenotype leaves the genotype intact" (114). What we are left with when we take into account the two positions is something of a historical contradiction, not entirely irreconcilable, but still problematic: on the one hand, organisms are seen as behaving reflexively, machines responding to the machinery of the environment, while on the other, the genetic make-up of an individual is seen as the final, determining cause – but of course both possibilities are deterministic or mechanistic.

Though Canguilhem does not address this contradiction per se, in a short digression on laboratories and artificially constructed milieus he does point the way to a different understanding of the relationship between milieu and organism, one in which the organism pushes back on the environment, shapes it in turn: "to study a living being in experimentally constructed conditions is to make a milieu for it, to impose a milieu on it; yet it is characteristic of the living that it makes a milieu for itself, that it composes its

milieu" (111); the laboratory produces “pathological relations.” He uses the analogy that the relationship of the organism’s to its environment :: the relationship of the organism’s parts to the whole of the organism. Or restated: "the organism itself lives in a milieu that, in a certain fashion, is to the organism what the organism is to its components." Further, "a living being is not a machine, which responds to excitations with movements, it is a machinist, who responds to signals with operations." Canguilhem suggests that it is more proper to conceive of the relationship between the organism and its milieu as a dialectic, with each always modifying the other.

The oversight, as Canguilhem sees it, in the life sciences of this dialectical relationship is accompanied by other problems that are inherent in the discipline of biology – specificity, individualization, totality, and irreversibility – that arise from taking organisms as test subjects. In the essay mentioned previously, “Experimentation in Animal Biology,” Canguilhem observes that an organism is a species-specific, whole individual at a unique point in time and in process, and this poses several challenges to biology: it becomes difficult to generalize between species, to replicate one's subjects in order to verify one's results, to pinpoint causes and effects, and to say of a result that it is generalizable across the life history of a subject. Though not the focus of this particular essay, Canguilhem also asks what it means for humans to use other humans as test subjects. This crucial question is raised against the ghastly backdrop of Josef Mengele’s human experiments in the concentration camps. This issue of experimentation on man poses problems, problems whose solutions "presuppose[s] an idea of man, that is to say, a philosophy" (19). What does it mean for man to become both the subject and the object of his own search for knowledge? As Canguilhem notes, "One can say today that biology

is a science of decisive importance for posing the philosophical problem of the means to knowledge and the value of these means" (21-2).

Canguilhem was a vociferous opponent of Nazism and a member of the resistance. Roberto Esposito argues in *Bios* that Canguilhem's "philosophy of biology" is a strong counterpoint the Nazi "thanatopolitics":

> "When [Canguilhem] writes that 'health is in no way a demand of the economic order that is to be weighed when legislating, but rather is the spontaneous unity of the conditions for the exercise of life,' he can't help but refer critically and above all to Nazi state medicine, which had made that bio-economic procedure the hinge of its own politics of life and death." (189)

Canguilhem wanted to honor the specificity of all forms of life, whereas the Nazis stripped life to its "bare material existence." And as Esposito follows through with his argument, he points to Canguilhem's insistence that norms are not be imposed from the outside onto the organism (are not generalizable from one organism to the other), but are "coincident" with the organism itself.

As I mentioned, there are critics of the life sciences from within the field itself. One of the more influential of these critics is R.C. Lewontin, currently a genetics professor at Harvard University, whose work *Biology as Ideology*, published in 1991, attempts to lay out the various ideological biases of biology and the problematic science which gives support to these biases. Lewontin is specific regarding what he means by "science as ideology": it is the undue influence science has over other areas of life, particularly the power it possesses to legitimate the current social order. Lewontin's

concern with science's ability to legitimate the inequality of society has led some to label him a Marxist; however, many would agree with his characterization of Herrnstein and Murray's infamous study of race and intelligence presented in *The Bell Curve* as obviously ideological – yet would still dispute the ideology present, though less apparent, behind such scientific research as the Human Genome Project. The genomics to which this research contributes is posited as capable of capturing the breadth of what it means to be human (or any other species in question), and the soon-discernible genetic destiny, if not presented as inescapable as it is in hard line geneticism, is nevertheless increasingly accorded a position of dominance over forces of socialization. In Lewontin's words: "These three ideas – that we differ in fundamental abilities because of innate differences, that those innate differences are biologically inherited, and that human nature guarantees the formation of a hierarchical society – when taken together, form what we can call the *ideology of biological determinism*" (23). We can see here, in the view criticized by Lewontin, the triumph of Nature over Nurture, an inattention to what Canguilhem more properly conceives as the dialectical relationship between the organism and its environment.

On the surface, the ideological framework of determinism seems to contradict that of *homo œconomicus*, which presumes a rational agent. But ideologies, even if they are working together rather than competing, may not be logically consistent. This framework of biological determinism contributes to biopower an acceptance of the totalizing view of the individual's body and a relatively unquestioning submission to the diagnosis of and recommended treatment for individual ills. In the case of biological or genetic determinism, it inculcates in the individual an orientation which precludes environmental

causes. We may all harbor doubts about the legitimacy of a solely deterministic view of the human, but they are repressed. I cannot help but think of the protagonist of Todd Haynes's black comedy *Safe*, who suffers from environmental illness or multiple chemical sensitivity. While her illness seems to be psychosomatic, resulting from her stifled lifestyle, her acute paranoia also touches on the repressed doubts about the effects of industrialization on our own environment and consequently our health.

A corresponding example, drawn from political reality, concerns GMO's. Although the purported objectivity of much scientific research on GMO's may be called into question on the basis of funding origins, the limited research one might reliably call unbiased seems to suggest that there are few health hazards posed by GMO's; moreover, the same processes used to manufacture GMO's are also being used in the production of other industrial products such as biofuels and are considered safe. Nevertheless, there is a strong and growing anti-GMO protest movement which seeks to ban the production and marketing of "Frankenfoods" – most European states now prohibit or strictly control the research – as well as a generalized suspicion within the public at large. Why do they instigate such a response? I would offer that the reaction is based upon a few underlying political issues. The issue of personal health and the possible disruption to the human genome and consequent health problems is a factor; however, while the danger to the body is not quite a red herring, it would be simplistic to reduce the concern to this. What is at stake is not whether the body is truly in danger, but that the individual lacks any choice in the matter. If much of *homo œconomicus*'s consumption is oriented toward self-preservation and curation of the body, then such issues show the underlying futility of these endeavors and the sense of threatened autonomy is amplified because the

perceived threat is located at precisely the site which most individuals still perceive an illusion of control, that of the body. The fierce political conflict over GMO's highlights the contradictions between an ideology of the marketplace which holds that the consumer exercises authority through his or her purchasing power, the economic and political forces which circumscribe such choices, and the scientific research which purports to be objective. The truth of the ideological aspect of this research threatens to break through to the level of consciousness.

Aside from a few notable critics of the ideology of biology such as Lewontin, however, if one examines closely modern cultural commentary on the life sciences, it does not seem to mount much of a challenge to certain presumptions of science. In journals such as *Politics and the Life Sciences* and *Medicine and Philosophy* critics rarely question the underlying Enlightenment narrative of progress put forward by scientists and science commentators. For example, in her article "Genuine Fakes: Cloning Extinct Species as Science and Spectacle," Amy Fletcher examines what she calls a "Lazarus project," the attempt to clone the extinct Tasmanian tiger. She asks, somewhat reductively, "Would cloning an extinct species be science, spectacle, or both?" Her consideration of the possible spectacularization of science is unsatisfying for although she makes reference to *Jurassic Park* and the "allure of time travel" that the possible resurrection of an extinct species holds for the general public, she fails to interrogate the grounds of the fascination exerted.

More problematically, though, her analysis implicitly favors the perspective and prerogatives of "serious science." In her conclusion, she references the "balloonmania" that surrounded the hot air balloon in its early years and quotes historian Paul Keen on

the phenomenon: "[balloonmania] began to incur the wrath of scientists and intellectuals because of the growing fear that it inspired mass delusion and substituted technical trickery in place of serious science" (56). Similarly, then, one can assume that Fletcher's analysis of the spectacle involved in the Tasmanian tiger cloning project is sympathetic to the "serious" practitioners of contemporary cloning science. Her final assessment of the Tasmanian tiger project is that it was a spectacle: "When the thylacine cloning project left the lab and entered the public domain, it could not be contained within the Museum's preferred frame of progressive scientific innovation. The project's most visible proponents quickly lost control of the project's social meaning and significance" (57). There is a curious alignment here that elides an important question. The project's "social meaning and significance" can only mean the "progressive scientific innovation" in the terms of which the Museum had hoped to frame the project. But Fletcher is already convinced of cloning's place in scientific progress – no framing or persuasion by the Museum is needed. If the general public is captivated by the more exaggerated claims of cloning's proponents, then this is a hindrance to the proper progress of science. There is no need for caution regarding science's drive.

Even when Fletcher briefly mentions how anxieties regarding science and biotechnology's power are related to such deep concerns at those surrounding the individual's death, it is very nearly figured as a public panic, lamentable for its ignorance and obstruction of science. She notes, "To propose conquering extinction conjures the last seeming incontrovertible facts that even science cannot touch – the finality of death and species elimination," and then goes on to say that whiles scientists "may hope to contain biotechnological debates within fixed boundaries of credentialed expertise," but

“the closed world of expert scientific inquiry opens up into messy disputes” (57). Against its will, Fletcher seems to say, science spills over into society and politics – whereas presumably before it could remain cloistered and protected in its walls, free to pursue its enlightened ideals. It should go without saying that the possibility, however, remote, of immortality or even near-immortality would be intoxicating to individuals of any era; but in the age of biopower, it carries special resonances. If biopower works through the production of life, eternal life on the immanent plane would be its crowning achievement, a concentration of its authority to make live or let die.

As Fletcher’s casual dismissal of the public’s anxieties about the life sciences indicates, when critics do examine the potential effects of advances in the life sciences, they often frustratingly dismiss the majority of concerns as hysterical in their final analysis. David Wasserman, in his article “This Old House: The Human Body and the Human Genome as Objects of Historic Preservation,” positions himself at the far end of speculative science in a response to another article which had urged for restraint of genetic modifications of the body on the basis of a human heritage. The bodily ground of this human heritage is based upon, according to Wasserman, the body’s “familiar contours and other dimensions have become deeply ingrained in all human cultures and have played a pervasive role in the course of human events” (43). After covering the scientific obstacles and reviewing the various paths such alteration of the genome might take and their various potential costs and benefits, he ends with the following statement which is paradoxically both banal and outrageous: “a genetically-engineered baby will still inspire amazement (and relief) as it draws its first breath and emits its first cry” (47). Onward with the march of progress!

The Fletcher and Wasserman pieces are fairly representative of academic writing about the life sciences; some readers might even consider them more challenging than the average offering. What can account for the lack of critical thought surrounding the biological sciences, the sort of implicit trust in the prerogatives of science, and the general reaction, on the part of both academic critics and the general public, of fascination? To begin to puzzle this out, we should return to the shift in thought regarding Nature noted by Foucault.

As we pass from the regime of the visible order of things, the order which belonged to Nature and was seen as evidence of god's handiwork, to the regime of the invisible, the relationship between Nature and the deity becomes complicated, if not altogether obviated. Where before Nature manifested design, its characteristics observable to the naked eye, now with the life sciences' increasing concern with the function of invisible elements the deity's role is reduced or imperceptible. Contemporaneous with the loss of faith which occurs in modernity on any number of fronts there is also the challenge posed to the former task of God's, that of ordering life, which is to say finally, that of endowing the natural system with meaning. And so, life, our bodies, come to be perceived as an amalgamation of discrete physical parts, each evolved in order to meet a biological need, some nevertheless now obsolete. Maybe the twenty-first century contemplator of the human body feels it works as a beautifully orchestrated system, maybe she views it as a Rube Goldberg machine: the perception matters little insofar as in either case it is still without design or plan and therefore without ultimate meaning.

There is, then, at the heart of the view of the organism or body that is proffered by the modern life sciences, a fundamental lack. We can begin to apprehend the basis for the fetishization of the biological sciences, especially that surrounding the field of genetics. As I hope to show, this also explains the dynamics behind the growth of at least a certain strand of bioart. Given bioart's unique position of representing science to the public from an internal perspective – or as near to an internal perspective as is possible for what is still ultimately a representative art – one might hope for a rigorous exploration of the ideological influence of the biological sciences. But unfortunately, despite its being situated within a complex ethical, political, and cultural matrix, bioart often fails to launch a successful critique of science.

Bioart is a relatively new discovery for me. The term bioart was coined by artist Eduardo Kac in 1997, but its entrance into the popular imagination is typically sourced at the controversy regarding the Vacanti mouse, or *earmouse*, a few years earlier in 1995. While the earmouse project was not strictly bioart, the methods used and the ethical questions generated were similar to those of bioart today; moreover, many bioartists credit the earmouse experiment with inspiring their own work. While I remember the media ubiquity of the mouse – whose ear, it should be clarified, was not actually genetically engineered to grow on the back of the mouse but was surgically implanted – since then bioart has been off my radar, as it has been, I'm assuming, for most of my readers. And despite the seemingly unavoidable fascination these projects seem to wring from their audiences, the writing on bioart is scant: a handful of popular and uncollected academic essays and a couple of academic volumes. I should note that the term bioart itself is often rejected or modified, and delving into the nomenclature is somewhat

laborious and not always fruitful. However, there is a general distinction between biomedia and biotopics. Biomedia refers to art which uses biotechnology in some fashion, while biotopics refers to art which simply address biology thematically. Though works featuring biomedia are the focus of this paper, I will be retaining the term bioart because it is the favored term in popular usage.

Bioartists repeatedly face legal and political challenges to their artistic practices. In what is possibly the most famous legal battle within the circle of bioartists, Steve Kurtz, a professor of art at SUNY Buffalo and a member of the art group Critical Art Ensemble, was arrested and charged with "bioterrorism" by the FBI in 2004 when Buffalo police entered his house upon his wife's death and found "suspicious" materials in his home lab, including petri dishes and books on bio-weaponry which Kurtz was using to recreate a 1952 British military experiment that attempted to use the plague as a weapon. Kurtz's case became something of a *cause célèbre* in the bioart world with supporters creating fundraisers for his legal expenses and providing venues for small exhibitions (such as *Seized*, in which Kurtz displayed the trash left behind by the FBI after their raid) and was the subject of a documentary, *Strange Culture*, while larger galleries and museums such as the Whitney refused to exhibit his recreation of the military experiment (Kurtz's would have used a harmless bacteria), instead offering video footage. After a protracted legal battle, the charges against Kurtz were eventually dropped. In general, bioartists face a number of legal obstacles. In the UK, a gallery must apply to the Human Tissue Authority for a license to display human tissue; only one gallery has received such a license. Andrew Krasnow, an American artist, was unable to exhibit his works – lampshades, maps of the United States, flags, and boots made of

human skin donated by deceased white males – in Cincinnati after Bob Dole and Newt Gingrich launched a campaign against it, but eventually did receive a permit from the UK's Human Tissue Authority.

These legal challenges are a manifestation of bioart's capacity to arouse public anxiety regarding the possibility of *contagion*, which is used by the modern security state as the rationale for its increasingly repressive security measures. But the interest these cases garner also connects to the sense of fascination which bioart evokes. Bioart often uncritically reproduces the fascination we feel towards the realm of scientific knowledge, when instead we would hope for a critique of this fascination. The life sciences have experienced an explosion in research, funding, and media coverage in the past few decades. In particular, genomics research has offered up a sweepingly grand narrative in which genetic testing, gene databanks, gene therapy, and pharmacogenetics will fulfill the promise of finally decoding "the human," answering the question of what makes us who we are and solving pesky problems like disease, mental illness, and mortality. Although some genomics research has had success in recent years – for example, gene therapy, after suffering a number of setbacks which included the deaths of human test subjects, has been showing promise in treating diseases like Parkinson's, color blindness, and pancreatitis, among others – such "genehype," paralleled perhaps only by the fervor with which evolutionary psychology explains all modern behavior as originating ipso facto from evolutionary processes, is problematic not only because of the questionable promises it makes, but also in a larger social sense in that it participates in a mystification, or as I will call it, a fetishization, of the life sciences.

Take, for example, bioartist Andrew Pelling's comment on one of the more infamous of so-called immortal cell-lines available to researchers, the HeLa cells which were cancerous cervical cells extracted from a patient, Henrietta Lacks, who died in 1951, he says, "Every lab in the world has HeLa cells. I'm sure this has been thought about by other people, but it is such a bizarre phenomenon. What's even more strange is that it is so easy to genetically modify these things. To create new cells that would have never have existed. It's bizarre how much power we have." Pelling apparently cannot get past his own fascination with how bizarre and strange it all is. We can see another, subtler example of such fetishization in the documentation of a collaborative project between Pelling and Anne Niemetz, the *Semi-Living Lego MiniFigs* project. The ostensible purpose of the project was to consider the ethical implications of the production and disposal of great quantities of living organisms. The artists noted that the one of the primary functions of the lab was "to grow and mass-produce disposable living things." They continue: "In a month, we (the Pelling Lab) generate on the order of a billion cells, we probably only use 1% for actual 'science' and the rest are destroyed or frozen for later." For the project, they took human cells, modified with jellyfish DNA to glow green, and used them to form a skin on the Lego figures. Presumably, the rather thin satirical comment is generated by the connection between mass-produced living organisms and mass-produced anthropomorphic plastic toys. What is more interesting is the way the documentation of the project generates focus on the science. Like many bioartists, the two tracked the progress of their project on a blog. Across dozens of entries, they detail every step of the project: the materials used, the quantities, the failures, and the successes – and in the meantime, it must be noted – consuming even

more. Clearly, what is of real interest here and most likely also to the audience following the project is the science: the success or failure of the scientific endeavor.

The small body of criticism dedicated to bioart is divided between those who believe that bioart propagates such fetishization or demystifies it. An instructive example of the quandaries posed by a certain strand of bioart is Eduardo Kac's *GFP Bunny* project, which ignited a firestorm of controversy in the general public. Kac commissioned a French lab to create a green-glowing rabbit, named Alba, which he planned to take home and treat as a domestic pet, but the lab withdrew its offer, choosing instead to keep Alba at the lab. Kac mounted a campaign which drew wide support though no success to pressure the lab into releasing the rabbit. Jacqueline Stevens – who amusingly calls Kac "the Damien Hirst of bioart" – suggests Kac's piece is an example of bioart that biotech firms, who have an interest in producing positive images of biotechnology in order to drum up financial investments, are likely to praise because it posits "genetic research as a new and magical field of possibility" (55), a sentiment that another bioart critic whose argument I will discuss later, Claire Pentecost, agrees with, calling *GFP Bunny* a "well-executed fetish object sustaining the mystification of creativity and the opacity of partnerships, ownership, knowledge partitions, and stakes in the life sciences" (118).

Yet critic Jens Hauser, examining another, similar work of Kac's entitled *The Eighth Day*, which features a small-scale replica of the globe populated by GFP rodents, feels that critics of bioart who believe it lacks substance are unappreciative of a key aspect of the works. Hauser distinguishes between art which privileges what he calls "meaning effects" and art such as bioart which privileges "presence effects," and argues that critics of bioart are oblivious to its presence effects. However true this may be, his

discussion of such presence effects in Kac's work is vague: in his words, "the effects of presence both condense and dramatize." Instead of a positive theory of presence effects, he relies mostly on a negative formulation of them: people who do not view the artworks firsthand lack the experience of presence. Hauser's critique, falling back on some ambiguous notion of presence, is much in keeping with the bioart which Stevens and Pentecost question for its reification of the mystique of science. Much of the emphasis on the presence, or the term which is used analogously in other analyses of bioart, affect, strikes me as a compensatory gesture for the affectively emptied out quality of the life sciences. As the life sciences increasingly see the human as an instrumental object, an encoded being to be ultimately decoded, bioartists and its supporters offer a view of their bioartworks as full of affect.

To be clear, it is not precisely that I feel affect to be unimportant to an understanding of bioart; rather, I am making a metacritical comment. It is rather critics' overemphasis on affect to the exclusion of other concerns and the use of affect to make claims of significance for bioartworks which are relatively thin - which have, in fact, not much else to offer other than presence - that I feel is somewhat suspicious and, as we will see, tied to the fetishistic function of such artworks. Zizek's remarks on excretory art given at an international symposium in 1998 are relevant:

> "The emergence of excremental objects which are out of place is thus strictly correlative to the emergence of the place without any object in it, of the empty frame as such. Consequently, the Real in contemporary art has three dimensions, which somehow repeat within the Real the triad of Imaginary-Symbolic-Real….Finally, the Real is the obscene excremental

> Object out of place, the Real "itself." This last Real, if isolated, is a mere fetish whose fascinating/captivating presence masks the structural Real, in the same way that, in the Nazi anti-Semitism, Jew as the excremental Object is the Real that masks the unbearable "structural" Real of the social antagonism." ("The Matrix")

Although the discussion preceding the above excerpt revolves around the relationship between Duchamp's *Fountain* and Malevich's *The Black Square on the White Surface* (the *Fountain* is the excremental object which can only emerge after "the place without any object in it, or Malevich's *Black Square* piece), I think we can, without too much effort, stretch this to explain the phenomenon I have just been considering. Thus these excremental objects of bioart which appear to be full of affect – or, as I have just qualified, whose significance is predicated solely upon their production of affect because they are *present* – are dependent upon the affectively blank space created by contemporary science. Zizek uses the term "fetish" in his discussion, and Claire Pentecost calls *GFP Bunny* a "fetish object," though Pentecost does not elaborate on this metaphor. I hope to show in the following discussion that this is precisely the conceptual understanding of a certain strand of bioart that we need to employ.

The history of the theorization of the concept of the fetish is long and follows at least three different, though occasionally intersecting, paths: that of religious fetishism, that of Marxian commodity fetishism, and that of psychoanalytic fetishism, which is probably the most recognizable form of the fetish. In *Fetish: an Erotics of Culture*, Henry Krips has taken the psychoanalytic conception of fetishism and applied it to culture. His model is appropriate to the discussion at hand.

Krips revisits the *Fort-Da* game discussed by Freud and then revisited by Lacan, in which a child spools a cotton-reel out and back. This game is pleasurable to the child because in a limited way, it addresses a lack the child senses in himself. This is an originary lack of being, the awareness that one is dependent on others, and, believing that the mother can fill this lack, he wants the mother to return. Instead, he is forced to substitute the cotton-reel, yet though it gives him pleasure, it is not the plenitude of pleasure, the complete fulfillment of his lack, which he had sought and continues to seek. This substitution of the cotton-reel for the mother (a signifier subbing for another signifier) works because they are structurally homologous: they are "both embedded in structures of alternating presences and absences" (20). Or the game as a whole can even be said to sub for the mother.

As Krips goes on to say, the cotton-reel is an instance of an *objet a*. The mother's breast is the original, paradigmatic *objet a*. After the child has weaned, the breast is retroactively believed to be capable of fulfilling all the child's needs. This ghostly value that has been ascribed to the breast is a value it never, in fact, possessed. All ensuing *objets a* are substitutions, but substitutions of a specific type, as Krips suggests in his summarization of another theorist here:

> "it is a catachresis, a substitute for an object constituted retrospectively through the act of substitution. To be specific, in putting itself forward as a substitute, the *objet a* creates the false impression that there was something – an original lacking object, for instance, the mythical overflowing maternal breast – for which it acts as a substitute." (21)

Krips goes on to point out that the *objet a* is both the cause of desire (though not desired itself) and an impediment to desire, as it districts the individual from trying to fulfill his needs, offering him that little bit of pleasure.

I would like to propose that aspects of the popular perception of the biological sciences, particularly gene iconography and genehype, function as cultural fetishes or *objets a*. What advantage does this approach possess over other existing approaches? There has been some critical work on the public perception of genetics, but generally the scholars in this field begin with the assumption that genetics occupies the role of cultural icon or a myth. Critic Anna Svalastog, for example, chastises other writers on the public perception of genetics for their dismissal of the popular opinion as "hoopla." This, Svalastog says, is unfortunate and unhelpful because it reduces the myth of DNA to fantasy. It ignores the possibility of any truth or knowledge carried in the purported myth of DNA. She makes an argument for understanding the popular perception as a myth instead. What is to be gained by understanding it as myth? While she does not state it explicitly, she seems to believe that the growth of myth around genetics engenders action and helps us understand genetics, "its fundamental realities, relations, consequences and options," in ways that we otherwise might not have (484).

This is a rather rosy view of the cultural understanding of genetics. Certainly myth can be used to induce action and further thought, but the contemporary attitude towards the life sciences seems less oriented towards understanding than submitting to obscurantism. The popular perception of the biological sciences is neither myth nor simply hoopla. By utilizing a model of fetishism rather than myth, we can begin to understand how the public perception of the life sciences works according to processes of

concealment and substitution. This model of fetishism is less related to eroticism and scopophilia than the mystifying power of the primitive fetish. Commentators on advancements in genetics often stand in awe at the symmetry, compactness, and power of DNA. Evolutionary biology and genetic determinism are offered, sometimes explicitly, as the scientific replacement for belief in God and the meaning of existence. This proposition is a catachresis which functions similarly to Krips' definition mentioned above, though within the realm of culture instead of individual psychology. The suggestion that genetics endows human life with purpose, evolutionarily developed, is a substitution for the belief in a God, which is then retroactively constituted by the substitution – like the maternal breast, God's overflowing abundance has been lost. God is given a phanatsmatic value proportional to the lack which modern existence feels. (It further might be claimed that the idea of God was itself the original cultural *objet a*.) This process is one that occurs as a field of "'subjective effects' constructed around a lost object" (104).

The reference to a deity in our contemporary age often signals only what we is not accessible to us, the paltriness of our existence; however, when it is referred to in connection to contemporary science, it is accompanied by a quaint nostalgia, followed by an optimistic turn to the future and the promise of science. It would be imprudent to suggest that bioart's fetishization of the life sciences was constituted solely by its dubious dodge of teleology. Instead, there is an array of other issues which might be gathered under the umbrella of bioart's deception: the complicity of science with power and science's own divorce from the needs put forward by social reality which it could meet but doesn't.

But fetishes can also be material objects, concrete substitutions, such as the cotton-reel. Gene iconography and genehype are materializations of the aforementioned metaphoric substitutions. The popular presentation of the biological sciences explains while also mystifying. The icon of contemporary biological sciences, the DNA double helix signals paradoxically both the summit of the Enlightenment, our mastery of nature through scientific knowledge, and yet also our supposed inability to overcome our innermost nature. Or to frame it in slightly different terms, while an emblem of human agency, the symbol of DNA also speaks to the purported universality of human nature and thus hides subjectivity. Even the usual visual composition of the iconic symbol itself brings into conjunction two disparate realms: the artificiality of the computer graphic with its high contrast and frequently neon palette juxtaposed with the content drawn from the natural body.

Bioart, in those instances when it functions as part of the fetishization of the life sciences (which, it bears repeating, it does not always do), possesses those same characteristics of fetishization that gene iconography and genehype possess. However, this fetishizing strain of bioart goes beyond the simple iconicity offered by genehype. It has a more specialized role as a fetish, one related to the scopic regime of the life sciences. Foucault suggests that the transition from the classical to the modern periods of biology is a move from the order of visible to that of the invisible, thus some bioart may be seen as an attempt to materialize that invisible order. If the material aspect of the cotton-reel's substitution for the mother can be characterized by the repetition of absence and presence, then bioart works similarly in the repeated surfacing of the invisible to the level of the visible. It materializes the content of modern biology, the substrate of bodily

existence invisible to the naked eye, that which is only ever otherwise visible with the aid of technological instruments: cells, DNA, even cellular sonic vibrations are transformed into visible and audible presences. By making visible the invisible, these bioartworks, like the fetish which is the substitute for the (missing) phallus of the mother, both delimit the bounds of scientific knowledge and conjure its power.

This surfacing goal is acknowledged by bioartist Victoria Vesna in the introduction to her project, "Blue Morph Effect": "Once an artist takes on the challenge of making the invisible visible, or the inaudible audible, s/he is almost immediately thrown into the realm of energy at the edge of art and science." Consider the newly emerging field which Vesna works in, that of sonocytology. Scientists, artists, or musicians, using an "atomic force microscope," can touch the microscope's tip to the edge of a cell's membrane. As the membrane oscillates the needle reads the vibrations like the grooves of a record. These vibrations can be amplified or turned into visual effects. Immersing the cells in different media will change the nature of the sound made. First discovered by bioartist Andrew Pelling and scientist James Gimzewski in 2002, it has become a very popular technique for bioartists. Pelling himself, along with collaborator, Anne Niemetz, later used the acoustic technology for an artwork entitled "Dark Side of the Cell," which is described as follows on the project's website:

> "*The dark side of the cell* [sic] is the first composition ever to utilize cell sonics. The staging of the 'musical cells' takes place in a darkened, acoustically immersive space, enhanced with a number of sculptural objects, onto which microscopic imagery of the sonic cells and their

cellular sonograms are projected. The construction of the sculptural elements is inspired by the inner architecture of cells."

This example of bioart, and the subgenre of sonocytology of which it is part, have something of the Kantian beautiful about them (and that "something" includes such a judgment's exasperating quality, but I will discuss this at greater length when I explore the aesthetics of bioart). But in Niemetz's paper on the project, "Singing cells, art, science, and the noise in between," a tension is conveyed and the project's true interest belied. Niemetz asserts that "claiming the tool of the scientist – the Atomic Force Microscope - as a new musical instrument and introducing the sound of cells in the form of a concert is performed as a cultural act." This is accurate, although the assertion comes close to being a truism. However, then Niemetz points out that while scientists do not yet know why cells oscillate, these oscillations can still be controlled as in the project, thereby highlighting the "discrepancy between scientific knowledge and technological power." She enigmatically intones: "Much mystery is brought forth."

It is in such pronouncements and characterizations of their own work that bioartists demonstrate the magnetic sway knowledge and technology has over them. Bioart itself may lie at the intersection of art and science and may consider itself a cultural act, but it is often perversely preoccupied with this other intersection, that of knowledge and technology. We see here the fetish at work, and in such a reading, then, the claims of artistic significance are thin covers for the underlying processes, deceptions performed upon the audience.

Not all purveyors of bioart are impressed with either its aesthetic offerings nor with its purported ethical and political concerns. However, these audiences are not

necessarily more cognizant of the cultural processes at work: they may see through some of the artifice, but they do not necessarily see what lies beneath. This distracting move is equally troublesome as the outright deception. For these audiences, it is the conspicuousness of the technology, the flashiness of the visual and auditory effects, which cause them to dismiss the artworks. But such a dismissal is still an effect of the fetish's power. Krips examines a similar effect in the narratorial descriptions in Madame Bovary. These descriptions "fast[en] upon details not because they are salient but rather because, at an unconscious level, they distract" (104) from what cannot be expressed, and in bioart this is ultimately the lack at the heart of postmodern existence. The notion of distraction is key. If the flashiness does impress the audience, it distracts them, but even if it fails to impress them and seems instead gaudy or vulgar in its flashiness – this, too, is a distraction. This latter facet of such bioart corresponds to what Krips terms the double deception: "a deception that paradoxically depends upon the deceived seeing through another deception" (17).

The processes I have outlined above of delimitation and conjuration are maybe not unrelated. In thinking through to the limits of power, its apex, are we not summoning its power? What does it mean to think these far reaches in terms of art, to take the line between knowledge and the beyond and try to convey that line in terms of art? Are we not asking whether art has a capacity to transcend the limit of knowledge? But why art? Is it because art is a field over which that of knowledge has not exercised its dominion? As we turn this screw, suddenly bioart seems not to be a case of the aesthetic being used to pay obeisance to scientific knowledge, but – even in its most impoverished manifestations – an attempt to supplant or usurp scientific knowledge's absolute authority

through one of the last remaining holdouts. Of course, this is a properly idealist understanding of the processes at work, and such an understanding does not have the flexibility of the psychoanalytic model which allows one to account for the various deceptions and self-deceptions at play in bioartworks.

We are moving naturally to the issue of aesthetics in bioart. Or maybe it would be more appropriate to say the "non-issue" of aesthetics as there is a curious lacuna regarding what one would assume to be a central facet of this phenomenon. This lack of interest in aesthetics relative to the fascination exerted by bioart's political and ethical dimensions characterizes both the practices of bioart and the criticsm on bioart. Given this lack of interest, how is it then that bioart garners the public's acceptance of its status as art? There is, of course, bioartists' self-identification *as* artists. Certainly this self-identification is at least partially responsible for the popular verdict. But while one might quibble over whether the self-identification by practicing bioartists is sufficient to qualify their creations as art, even beyond this, it appears that bioart also receives the appellation of art because it has adopted the cultural trappings of the aesthetic object. Primarily this is accomplished through the announcement of itself as art via press releases, blog write-ups, the securing of funding for the arts (in addition to that funding it has secured for contributions to scientific research), etc. Additionally, though, through the staging of performances and gallery exhibitions, bioart invokes an audience, a constitutive feature of an artwork. But in some sense, bioart's status as art is granted according to the inescapable rules of the cultural logic of the capitalist aesthetic: if money is being thrown at it, it must be art. The more funding it receives, the more meaningful it must be. Bioart's usage of the cultural trappings of artworks allows it to borrow from the power of

the aesthetic, and it is granted a certain respect, even allure, because it has been accorded the status of art.

However, that status is, if not outright misleading, then obscuring. The general audience, the critics, and the practitioners of bioart all seem to agree that it is *prima facie* art without interrogating why we should consider it such. Occasionally bioartists do lay claim to aesthetic concerns, but even these claims are somewhat vexed. In a piece about a bioart workshop by Oran Catts, one of the founders of SymbioticA, and Gary Cass, they state that the purported mission of the workshop is to equip artists with the scientific and artistic tools needed to create bioart. This mission is important because art helps to create "cultural meaning and informed involvement that are needed in order for our society to comprehend the very significant changes we are facing" (143). In the workshop, "[t]he tools of modern biology are demonstrated and used through artistic engagement" (144). But the rest of the mission statement fails to address aesthetics, and the workshop itself does not discuss aesthetics in any manner. Of course, by deciding that bioart is not actually art because it does not possess any of the recognizable properties of artworks, I am maybe begging the question: after all, bioart is a purportedly experimental field of art, one in which the aesthetic properties have not yet been settled upon. But this does not mean it is beyond the scope of aesthetic judgment. It is important, then, to decide upon what basis we would feel justified in calling bioart "art."

One way to approach the issue is via aesthetic formalism. Claire Pentecost, in the same article from which I have quoted her previously, addresses the issue of formalism, but proceeds to blame the "persistent mutations of Kantian disinterestedness" for a whole host of problems, stretching culpability just a bit too far (113). Kantian disinterestedness,

which definition one begins to wonder if Pentecost might have misconstrued, is responsible for the institutionalization of the art object and its lack of an "integrated role in daily life." She draws questionable connections between a resurgence in the interest of the beautiful to neoliberalism and figures the resurgence as complicit in a consumerist oriented aesthetic. Presumably, the disinterestedness of the Kantian beautiful allows for the co-optation of art by the market. The production of art becomes an ever more specialized field, while the consumption of art is limited to a knowledgeable and wealthy section of the population – it becomes a class marker. This must be the "conventional, vexed, socially exhausted definition of art" that Pentecost says in her introduction she wants to avoid. Instead, Pentecost feels that the central social problem which bioart must confront is the alienation the average individual feels in the face of science due to mystification, the ambiguity of science's funding, and the secrecy designed to protect the intellectual property of science (112).

For Pentecost, "the artist is a person who creates various forms of interruption of these barriers," to create "points of access," or to increase scientific "legibility" (112,119,120). She discusses work by artists Brandon Ballengée and Natalie Jeremijenko. Jeremijenko undertook a project called *One Trees*, in which she planted 200 cloned trees in San Francisco. As these trees grow, they will naturally differentiate, thereby providing the public with the opportunity to witness the environmental influence on phenotypic expression. Another involves repurposing electronic pet dogs by equipping them with sensors for detecting toxins and setting them loose in purportedly hazardous construction sites. The *One Trees* project is compelling because it does seek to undercut the ideological insistence of biology on genetic determinism to showcase the importance of

milieu or environment. This potentially reduces the sense of alienation *science* causes for the public and effects an increase in scientific legibility. Pentecost's example of Jeremijenko's work establishes that the a possible social function of bioart; however, it does not conclusively settle the question of the aesthetic. The critical privileging of a social function should not be dependent upon the exclusion of the aesthetic.

I do not disagree that judgments of taste are often executed as social class markers. Nor am I planning to make a claim that we should apply a criterion of "beauty" to bioart. But the lack of interest in exploring aesthetic issues – or, in Pentecost's case, the vehement objection to formalism – is odd. To return to my previous question, upon what grounds can we call bioart art? Certainly, there are a number of artworks, such as the ones utilizing sonocytology, which might meet the strict Kantian criterion of an aesthetic judgment of the beautiful, exhibiting "purposiveness without purpose." Many of the bioartworks which Jens Hauser credits with unappreciated "presence effects" could also meet this Kantian understanding of the beautiful. Without delving too deeply into this issue, unfortunately many of these same artworks which might be called beautiful are susceptible to the charge of genehype or fetishization, precisely because the content is negligible and it is the prowess of science which fascinates. On the other hand, many of the critical analyses of bioart which focus on the relevance of bioartworks to the objective order of social relations do so to the exclusion of the art's subjective effects or aesthetic composition. There is a quandary here of how to develop an aesthetic theory of bioart which manages to mediate between both objective and subjective effects.

Just as the fetishistic bioart is a reaction to religion's diminishing influence and the lack of ultimate meaning which characterizes contemporary existence, a

reformulation of religious fetishism into scientific fetishism, so too does this other strain of bioart attempt to counter the dominion of an ever more instrumentalizing science. I believe it does so in two ways. The first course is to explicitly raise and critique the ethical issues of this science. The second seeks to reinject contemporary society with sacrality - thus, I will refer to it henceforth as sacred bioart.

There is, as an example of the kind of bioart which raises the ethical issues of science, Steve Kurtz's group, Critical Art Ensemble (CAE). CAE has grown increasingly radical in the last decade of its existence, beginning with their 2002 publication, *Molecular Invasion* (which has an epigraph featuring a quote by R.C. Lewontin), wherein they propose their program of "contestational biology." They argue for, among other things, "fuzzy biological sabotage," which straddles the line between the legal and the illegal, and is generally focused on scientific research and agricultural production of GMO's. Their tactics range from sabotaging scientific research by contaminating test samples to simulating safety drills in lab coats. In recent years, they have turned to the subject of U.S. defense policy through such pieces as the public simulation of the explosion of a dirty bomb.

Another of bioart's areas of concern is the taxonomic classification of life, and the related distinction between the animal and the human. Oron Catts's piece *NoArk* features a two-headed bird which was central to the cabinet of curiosities presented through a red film, a natural history collection of insects, birds, primates through with vials interspersed throughout, then, through a blue film, the only "living" piece, biological moving cells. These cells, extracted from numerous different organisms, form a "blob," which, according to the website of the Catts-headed group The Tissue Culture and Art Project, is

“a unified collection of unclassifiable sub-organisms.” In an interview about the project, Catts describes what he believes to be the radical change instituted by Linnaeus’s classificatory schema for life: “now that we know so much about life, or we can systematically look at life, we can also start to systematically manipulate life.” Thus the blob is a critique of the episteme of biology which has regarded its notions of what is true as inviolable and how the authority of this knowledge has led to instrumentalization: in this case, the idea of life itself. How, exactly, do we determine what is “alive” and what does that mean for the entities which we study? According to classical taxonomies, the cells that are the capstone of the piece that Catts describes would not be characterized as alive because they do not reproduce with each other. However, through the use of structural irony, the positioning of cells at the end of the artwork's "narrative" of life and their juxtaposition with inanimate objects becomes significant: it highlights the ambiguous status of cells. Though not typically considered to be alive, they would seem to be so in *comparison* to the other pieces.

Many of the bioartworks probe the line between what is and is not considered alive, yet they ultimately do not undermine the taxonomic rationale, and instead simply gesture towards a shift of the line of demarcation. The piece described by Catts arguably comes closer to the goal of undermining this rationale than other bioartworks through its allusion to the Renaissance Wunderkammer, or cabinet of curiosities. Wunderkammer, like Catt’s work, often blended objects of disparate realms together, such as anthropological artifacts, religious artifacts, preserved animals and so on. And often these works transgressed the boundaries between fact and fiction. The allusion to the Wunderkammer points to our own sense of wonder in the face of such objects, suggesting

that that interest is grounded in something quite different from objective science. Wherever that final demarcation may end up, it will necessarily be contingent upon our own desire. This desire is based upon a fantasy of identity and difference, in which the animal is separated from the human, a reflection of our own position in the symbolic order. The allusion to the Wunderkammer also serves another analogous, but slightly more self-referential, purpose. Not only is it a reference to the fascination or fetishization of the public at large with those lines of identity and difference, it also points to bioart and biotech's own fascination with its products. (One might draw out the allusion even further by noting that the Wunderkammer – representing not exactly a microcosm of the world, but more precisely a microcosm of the limits of human knowledge – could only be supported by its wealthy patronage, drawing upon vast resources of capitalist enterprise and early colonialist endeavors. Similarly, though the mechanisms of financing differ, bioart is still inexorably dependent upon capitalist wealth.)

Despite the relative sophistication of the pieces produced by groups like the Critical Arts Ensemble and Symbiotica, the majority of bioart is relatively crude in its ethical interrogations. I have already mentioned Andrew Pelling's *SemiLiving Lego MiniFigs* piece and suggested that it relies upon the fascination of science for its effect. Additionally, though I would argue that it exmemplifies another blind spot of bioart, one related to the purported instrumentalization critique. One of the ethical concerns frequently referenced in interviews with the artists is the issue of laboratory waste. Laboratories will grow specimens and then euthanize them in order to extract a specific organ or use them for a limited purpose. Additionally, great numbers of specimens are culled because of their unsuitability for particular projects. Bioartists, ostensibly

dismayed by the sheer waste of life, make a case for their art as a recuperation of the remaining parts of the specimens. But it is precisely for this reason that animal rights activists have accused bioartists of participating in the same practices that they are purportedly criticizing, one of the many ethical parallax gaps, to borrow Zizek's concept, between bioartists and their audiences. For bioartists, the ethical problem is that life is being wasted, and suggestions that animal life shouldn't be used at all miss the good to which that life may be put to use; while for the animal rights activists, the ethical problem rests on the question of whether life should be used for research at all, and the bioartists only seem to be extending the principle of instrumentalization they should be criticizing. Beyond this problem, one might question the very ontological grounds of the statement "a waste of life." If the lab research has already rendered the animal dead beforehand, as is often the case, then can it properly be designated "alive"? Isn't this begging the question? That the bioartists do not question this is somewhat puzzling and paradoxical.

The ethical concerns of these artists take on a new dimension when the pieces fit the contours of what I am calling sacred bioart. Sacred bioart is marked by many of the same practices of religion, particularly primitive religions: festival-like gatherings, ritualistic behaviors, and shamanism. There have been a number of contemporary emulations of primitive religion, from the Surrealists in the early part of the century to the revival of spiritualism in the 1960's to today's gatherings such as Burning Man - a good percentage of both the 60's versions and contemporary gatherings being dependent, it goes without saying, upon mind-altering drugs. Unlike the latter cultural practices, sacred bioart does not explicitly figure itself as a new religion. It is art, a distinction which depends, in part, upon the contemplative orientation toward a mediating art object – a

distinction which becomes troubled in some bioart by the displacement of a material, inanimate art object with the human body.

Of course, this sacred bioart, just like the fetishistic bioart, is grounded in the latest scientific knowledge and technological advancements. How does it manage to avoid the trap of genehype? A truthful answer would acknowledge that it probably does not entirely avoid it, however, it does significantly distinguish itself through an emphasis on the subjective aspect of transgression whereas much of the fetishistic bioart emphasizes (or is stunned by) objective special effects. In thinking the subjective effects of the sacred bioart it is useful to return to Bataille here, particularly his theory of transgression: transgression is always the breaking of boundaries, overcoming of limits, flouting of prohibitions. But it should be qualified that for Bataille it is the tearing of limits within which is more important than the tearing of those without: as he powerfully suggests in *Erotism*: "Man achieves his inner experience at the instant when bursting out of his chrysalis he feels that he is tearing himself, not tearing something outside that resists him. He goes beyond the objective awareness, bounded by the walls of the chrysalis and this process, too, is linked with the turning topsy-turvy of his original mode of being" (39). It is those experiments which play on the boundaries of the human and the animal, the edible and the inedible, the animate and the inanimate, the Self and the Other, which arouse the most curiosity – and provoke the largest backlash.

Like Catts's *NoArk*, the victimless meat artworks are also concerned with classificatory schema, specifically that which addresses how our notion of humanity is founded upon a distinction between ourselves and our animal nature – which depends upon a distinction between ourselves and animals. We are human because we possess

taboos which we violate. It is in the violating of these taboos that we feel ourselves most human, and sacrifice offers one of the most sacramental manifestations of this. Sacrifice, whether of an animal or a human, through the death of the victim, or discontinuous being, ultimately reveals the continuity of being. Bataille suggests that animals were the earliest victims of sacrifice because they most likely were not seen as fundamentally different from primitive man; if they were, he conjectures, then they may have been viewed as more godlike than humans because they were not subject to the same logic of taboo and transgression that humans were. Victimless meat through its very name calls to mind practices involving sacrificial victims. Most obviously, it asks us to question the ethics surrounding the use of animals for food, clothing, and scientific research, a concern of bioart which I have noted previously (as well as its associated ethical paradoxes): what are our investments in the consumption of meat? if meat could be mass-produced without actually harming any animals, are we morally obligated to switch to consumption of it?

But on a deeper and somewhat more ambiguous level, I would argue, the "victimless" meat work also functions as a parody of sacrifice. Obviously, the explicit intention of the artists is to make meat victimless; but what is parodic about the project is that the whole process of sacrifice has been evacuated: there is no killing, there is no ritual – in effect there is no sacrifice. Essentially the current relation between the human consumer and the consumed animal, one extremely attenuated – nearly to a non-relation – by the industrial production and packaging of meat products, does not differ all that much from the one proposed by “victimless meat.” In a similar vein, there have been a number of bioartworks which invite the audience to participate in the disposal of biomaterials used in the exhibitions by exposing the biological materials to the air, thereby

contaminating them and preventing their further use. This "killing ritual," as it is called, also offers a parody of sacrificial ritual, one in which the killing is no different than throwing a discarded object into the trash. What I wish to suggest is that in both of these cases, the victimless meat and the killing ritual, the parody highlights the very absence of ritual and sacrifice in our own contemporary culture. What form of life, what type of "human," are we if we have eliminated these practices, so inherent to our definition of the human, from our lives?

When these victimless meat artworks are presented as edible to the audience rather than as simply representations of the idea of victimless meat – such as the laboratory grown "frog steaks" in the project *Disembodied Cuisine* which were eaten at a dinner-cum-performance – their impact shifts. Their force in these presentations depends less upon the political and ethical implications of the source of the meat, than the conjuncture of two different realms of life which are usually temporally and spatially remote from one another: the realm of biological science with its associations of potential contagion, preventive sterility, cognition, the monstrous, etc. and that of the domestic body, a separation symbolized by the isolation of the space of the laboratory, which then is nearly figured as a sacred space. Works such as *Disembodied Cuisine* use technology to explore the energies coursing through the body, to re-cathect the emotional and mental investments that have become habituated through the typical relations of taboo and transgression.

In *Disembodied Cuisine*, the "feast" took place in an industrial space with a dining area enclosed by glass walls adorned with HazMat signs and with a decontamination chamber sitting outside. The frog from which the cells were extracted

was also in attendance in a terrarium placed next to the dining table – bioartists are not without a sense of humor, apparently. While biology's material and ideological effects are omnipresent in our lives, we persist in the belief that our physical, domestic body – or our primitive body – is secure and "natural." The project asks us to break the taboo regarding the separation of the two spheres by consuming what is very "unnatural," an effect enhanced by the living presence of what should be all rights be dead. To cast this relation another way, in *Erotism* Bataille suggests, "Man has built up the rational world by his own efforts, but there remains within him an undercurrent of violence" (40). The transgression occurs when man gives rein to this violence or animality in some way. Against the backdrop of the scientific in *Disembodied Cuisine*, the violence within us is highlighted, and we are asked, in a sense, to eat our rationality.

Adam Zaretsky's *Brainus-Analolly Complex* invokes the same dichotomy between science and the body. Zaretsky created two objects, one an anus made of biopolymers and seeded with brain tissue, the other a lollypop made of biopolymers and seeded with anal tissue, both of which audiences were invited to lick. It also calls up the many ancient taboos related to defecation, including a sly reversal of the old adage presumably derived from those taboos, "Don't shit where you eat," which here becomes "Don't eat where you shit." I cannot help but be reminded of the meaning of William Burroughs's title *Naked Lunch*: that frozen moment when everyone sees what is at the end of every fork. It is in the light of this frozen moment, as the realm of scientific knowledge, typically remote and sanitized, is brought in for an intimate close-up, when the delineations of exterior and interior break down and the processes of consumption (the absorption of the exterior into the interior), digestion, and excretion (the passing

from the interior back into the exterior) become confused and fully implicated in one another. The result is a moment of what Bataille calls heterological knowledge, or the knowledge of what is other, instantiated through inner experience.

The last form of bioart which I will consider is that which rather than exhibiting concern for the body as a locus upon which various cultural taboos have been fixed, focuses instead upon expanding the capacity of the human body through technology, often addressing what might be considered the most fundamental boundary, that between Self and Other. These experiments, in which the artists modify their bodies through technology – attaching extra limbs or organs, undergoing cosmetic or implantation surgeries, adapting their bodies for wireless internet connections, and so forth – immediately call to mind cyborgs and subsequently Donna Haraway's theory of the same. Materially, these bioartworks certainly seem to meet the commonplace definition of the cyborg as a breaking of the boundaries between man and machine. Metaphorically, if one accepts Haraway's proposal that the cyborg is representative of "permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints," then these works do seem to meet that definition, too, whether one is elated at the supposedly revolutionary potential for identity or pessimistic at the premonition of a free fall of identity ("Cyborg Manifesto").

For example, the artist Orlan has undergone numerous cosmetic surgeries in order to provide her with a grab-bag full of features from women considered classically beautiful throughout the ages. These surgeries do not take place in the typical operating room, but in sumptuous rooms bedecked with velvet draperies and plush sofas upon which the audience sits, the atmosphere augmented by music, and the entire procedure

broadcast to worldwide viewers. These performances and Orlan's resulting physical profile make a political point about the ways in which aesthetics of feminine beauty may vary widely. But it is not solely a physical change. Refashioning one's body like that also entails a refashioning of identity - in this case, Orlan possesses, like Haraway's cyborg, a permanently partial identity.

However, not all bioartworks which take the human body as their focus fit match so neatly Haraway's conception of the cyborg – or maybe it would be more appropriate to say that they go beyond it, radicalize the potential contained within. Works like these, of course, could still be charged with genehype – Stelarc's work especially. *Exoskeleton*, in which he extends up out of an imposingly large, pneumatically-powerd machine resembling a robotic spider, would certainly seem to be a flashy and frivolous example of the application of technology to the human body (although, it must be noted, such these large-scale robotics projects may materialize and dramatize the ways in which the military-industrial complex uses a finely-tuned combination of human and machine to conduct its operations). A number of Stelarc's projects, however, are concerned with how technology allows for the extension of the capacities of the human body. He makes the following proposal in one of his introductions to a suspension piece: "Technology, which shatters the body's subjective totality of reality, now returns to reintegrate its fragmented experience. It literally brings the body back to its senses (sensors). The body, once again an integrated whole, becomes capable of subjectively perceiving and experiencing its new expanded environment" (*Obsolete Body* 52). The body is an "obsolete form," but "bionauts," as Stelarc terms them, could be "launched on multiple evolutionary trajectories to experience different and perhaps significant biological landscapes" (76).

Brian Massumi, whose work on affect I have discussed earlier, notes that Stelarc's performances are exercises in "perceptual poetry," an "art of sensation," which is the "direct registering of potential" (95, 97). This art of sensation is dependent upon the technology which Stelarc appropriates to his body, the "unthinkable objects….artifacts that can only be sensed." While flashy in appearance, Stelarc's projects have at their center a serious endeavor: through their explorations of sensation these projects offer us fantastical new views of the human and restoring what Bataille calls the "intimate order" in *Theory of Religion*, the work in which he offers his most cogent critique of both religion and scientific thought.

In *Theory of Religion*, Bataille posits an original intimate order, an order present in the animal kingdom and existing for early humans, in which beings are neither separate from one another nor from Nature (one senses another Bataillean influence on Foucault here). As humans passed from that intimate order, we entered the mythical order, in which consciousness had an awareness of things, but only an awareness couched in mythical determinations. With the birth of capitalist production came a world that has been reduced to *things*. Science, according to Bataille, is the perfect, almost necessary, accompaniment to this world. It is the clear consciousness of these things. For some time after the birth of science and the rational, real order of things, the intimate order was able to persist, but eventually the intimate, unreal order was completely separated from the real, rational, productive, scientific order. The resulting two realms (the intimate, unreal order and the real order of things) are treated very unequally: "Authority and authenticity are entirely on the side of things, of production and consciousness of the thing produced. All the rest is vanity and confusion" (97). The intimate order cannot be reached if it is

not accorded equal status with the real order. How does one do that? "SELF CONSCIOUSNESS [must take] up the lamp that science has made to illuminate objects and [direct] it toward intimacy."

We want, then, to restore the intimate order, but with the authenticity of objective knowledge. This poses problems, however. The intimate order is immediate, that is, lived and felt in the immediate moment. Knowledge requires time; it is an operation. Myth managed to meet intimacy's requirement of immediacy, but science does not. Attempting to restore the intimate order while meeting the requirements of objective knowledge entails a recognition by clear consciousness of the obscure nature of divine, intimate life: "Intimacy is the limit of clear consciousness" (99). We must then reduce the reduction of man to thinghood, reduce the reduction to intimacy. Stelarc’s numerous experiments with extension of the human body’s capabilities and his attempts at forging a more immediate, unmediated human networking function as that lamp of science directed towards intimacy, attempts to reduce the reductions.

These projects began in the 80's with his suspension experiments and then, as the technology became available, expanded to include those such as *Exoskeleton* and *Third Hand*, in which he had a mechanical third hand attached at the shoulder. As technology has miniaturized, including wireless broadcasting technology, Stelarc's experiments have increasingly turned to the possibilities of what might be called human networking. One of his ongoing projects is *Ear on Arm*. *Ear on Arm* is Stelarc's attempt to have a prosthesis in the form of an ear (modeled after his own) surgically implanted under the skin on his arm. This first step was successful. However, the next phase of the project - equipping the ear with a miniature microphone that will be wi-fi enabled in order to

broadcast what it "hears" to listeners tuning in on the internet - has met with more difficulty. Stelarc's body rejected the first attempt, forcing the removal of the microphone; he will be undergoing another surgery in the near future.

Stelarc's most promising project, in my mind, was *Ping Body*, performed in 1996. Though limited by the technology of the time, the project held forth the possibility of a radical new form of human connectivity. In this performance, Stelarc invited the audience to control his body. He attached various muscle electrodes to his body. Online users who were logged into a designated site were provided with a map of Stelarc’s body which indicated the parts they could choose to stimulate through computer input. Press a key, and Stelarc’s body would respond. One might charge that viewers/participants in the *Ping Body* performance have a relation to Stelarc that is no different from that they experience in connection with their video game avatar. Press a button and the avatar moves. If you will permit me an analogy drawn from science fiction, the future predicted by this might resemble the virtual universe of hackers called The Matrix in William Gibson's cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer*, in which the hackers assume virtual avatars they direct in this virtual space. (Gibson, incidentally, wrote the forward to a recent monograph on Stelarc.) This relation between subject and avatar is still a one-to-one relation in which the avatar is the transcendent expression of the identity of the subject. Instead, the sci-fi analogue which is more appropriate is that of the "Perky Pat" layouts in Philip K. Dick's The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch, in which users or players through the use of a drug called "Can-D" enter a virtual reality in which several players *share* the experience of being a player.

Even this is somewhat reductive and fails to capture the complexity of the experiment. It is not, of course, a computer-generated avatar that one moves but another human being, and the experience of seeing another individual's body move in response to an impulse of your own, your will, is irreducibly strange – uncanny and exhilarating. It is this, I would argue, constitutes what Bataille calls the immediacy of the intimate order or, elsewhere, the sovereign instant. In that instant, being is not "the servile means to an end more important than the being itself; it had to be there, sovereign, limitless, and never-ending, for no future goal, to reject whatever enslaved it" (188). Stelarc cedes control of his body to others in an instant highlighting the paradoxical nature of sovereignty, which is that while in the instant, being is closed in one sense, it also, "opens itself up while denying that which limits separate beings" (187). Here, we feel our own discontinuity fall away and we experience the lost continuity of the intimate order, one which participates, because of its transgressing of the boundary between the animate and inanimate, the man and the machine, in a type of sacrificial death because sovereignty is conditioned upon "loving death more than slavery" (188). For Bataille, the sovereign subject is in space what the festival is in time, and might we imagine a delirious future in which these come together?

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