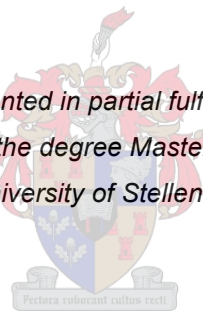

Representations of Excess in Relation to the Body in a Selection of Contemporary Visual Artworks

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requirements for the degree Masters in Visual Art at
the University of Stellenbosch*



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DECLARATION

By submitting this dissertation, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that production and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates forms of excess in representations of the body in specific examples of contemporary visual art in South Africa and internationally. Representations of excess are phenomena that have gained increasing prominence in recent art practice both locally and abroad. The discussion is focused on two artworks that are examples of this increasing phenomenon of excess in contemporary art: the Swedish video artist Nathalie Djurberg's video installation *Experimentet* (2009), and South African performance artist Steven Cohen's film *Golgotha* (2007-9).

My discussion of the two artworks revolves around the central question: what is the signifying role of excess in representations of the human body in contemporary visual art? This central question is asked throughout the dissertation with two aims in mind: firstly, to situate within a theoretical framework the phenomenon of excess in relation to depictions of the body in contemporary art; and secondly, to situate my own arts practice within this framework.

The analysis of Djurberg's *Experimentet* and Cohen's *Golgotha* is spread over four discussions, each relating to a specific aspect of the representation of excess in relation to the body. Firstly, I investigate the grotesque body with regards to Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of grotesque realism and Jacques Lacan's psychological notion of the fragmented body, or *corps morcelé*. Secondly, I examine the 'body spectacle' as a cultural critique of capitalism, and make specific reference to Cohen's use of real human skulls as shoes in *Golgotha* as a cultural critique of capitalism. In this discussion I also investigate George Bataille's philosophical enquiry into the notion of expenditure as a critique of capitalism. The 'body spectacle' is situated in the context of late-twentieth-century theorist Frederic Jameson's view of the postmodern and his exposition of the 'waning of affect'. Thirdly, I investigate excess and mimesis in representations of the female body, with specific reference to Djurberg's *Experimentet*. Here the discussion is situated within the context of French feminist psychoanalytical theory with Luce Irigaray's concept of the role of excess in mimesis. The study then turns to investigating the experiences elicited in spectators by representations of excess in relation to the body. I draw from George Bataille's writings of the function of taboo and Mikhail Bakhtin's insistence on the ambivalence of grotesque imagery to explain my own observations on images of excess. Here I argue, in reference to both *Experimentet* and *Golgotha*, that excess is characterised by the paradoxical stance of being simultaneously attracted and repulsed. Lastly I discuss my own current art practice with reference to the theoretical framework outlined here around representations of excess in relation to the body.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie verhandeling ondersoek die voorkoms van oordaad in die uitbeelding van die menslike liggaam in spesifieke voorbeelde van kontemporêre Suid-Afrikaanse en internasionale visuele kunswerke. Oordaadsuitbeelding is 'n verskynsel wat opvallender voorkom in huidige plaaslike en internasionale kunspraktyke. Die verhandeling fokus primêr op twee kunswerke ter illustrasie van hierdie verskynsel: die Sweedse videokunstenaar Natalie Djurberg se video-installasie *Experimentet* (2009), en Suid-Afrikaanse 'performance'-kunstenaar Steven Cohen se film *Golgotha* (2007 -9).

My bespreking van die twee kunswerke wentel rondom die sentrale vraag: watter aanduidende rol speel oordadigheid in uitbeeldings van die menslike liggaam in kontemporêre visuele kuns? Ter beantwoording van hierdie vraag het hierdie ondersoek ten doel om, eerstens, die verskynsel van oordaadsuitbeelding van die menslike liggaam in kontemporêre kuns binne 'n teoretiese raamwerk te plaas. Ten tweede gaan ek my eie kunspraktyk binne hierdie raamwerk plaas.

Die oorsig van Djurberg se *Experimentet* en Cohen se *Golgotha* word oor vier hoofstukke versprei. Elke hoofstuk bespreek 'n spesifieke aspek van oordaadsuitbeelding rakende die menslike liggaam. Ten eerste bespreek ek die groteske liggaam aan die hand van Mikhail Bakhtin se idêe van groteske realisme en ek verwys ook na Jacques Lacan se psigoanalitiese idêe van die gefragmenteerde liggaam, of *corps morcelé*. Die tweede ondersoek in die verband van oordaadsuitbeelding verwys na die 'liggaamspektakel' as kulturele kritiek op kapitalisme, met spesifieke verwysing na Cohen se gebruik van egte menslike skedels as skoene in *Golgotha*. Ek bespreek ook George Bataille se filosofiese ondersoek na die idêe van 'uitgawe' as kritiek op kapitalisme. Die 'liggaamspektakel' word geplaas binne die konteks van die laat-twintigste-eeuse teoretikus Frederic Jameson se opvatting van postmodernisme en sy verduideliking van die afname in gevoelsinhoud. Ten derde ondersoek ek oordaad en nabootsing in uitbeeldings van die vroulike liggaam, met spesifieke verwysing na Djurberg se *Experimentet*. Hier is die bespreking geplaas in die konteks van die Franse feministiese psigoanalitiese teorie van Luce Irigaray se konsep van die rol van oordaad in nabootsing. Die studie verander dan na die ondersoek na die ervarings wat by die gehoor ontlok word deur die uitbeeldings van oordaad rakende die menslike liggaam. Ek verduidelik my eie observasies oor oordaadsuitbeelding deur gebruik te maak van George Bataille se skrywes oor die funksie van taboe, sowel as Mikhail Bakhtin se aandrag op die ambivalensie van groteske beelde. Hier argumenteer ek, met verwysing na *Experimentet* en *Golgotha*, dat oordaad gekenmerk word deur die paradoks van gelyktydige aantrekking en walging. Ten einde bespreek ek my eie kunspraktyk met verwysing na die teoretiese raamwerk uiteengesit rondom uitbeeldings van oordaad rakende die liggaam.

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INTRODUCTION

“Moderation is a fatal thing. Nothing succeeds like excess.” (Oscar Wilde 2010:13)

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In the art historical canon the human body is generally represented as studies of the human form – as portraiture or as visual recordings of history. In contemporary visual art, however, representations of the body not only perform these functions, but are also employed as a means to communicate notions of excess in order to achieve specific conceptual goals. I am interested in contemporary art that visualises excess in representations of the body. This research concerns artists’ works that use the human body as a vehicle to represent notions of excess. Excess centred on the human body implies extreme representations of the human form – including the grotesque body, the fragmented body, the body spectacle and the body mimicked to excess. In analysing artworks that visualise excess in representations of the human form, the thesis also attempts to outline excess as a contemporary phenomenon in visual art. The phenomenon of excess is analysed with a focus on specific examples of South African and international contemporary art.

The difficulties related to defining and discussing notions of excess in contemporary visual art may arise from the fact that excess is an elusive term to define. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989. Sv, ‘excess’), excess can be defined in many ways, including: (i) “violence of passion”, extravagant or rapturous feeling, or, unrestrained manifestation of grief; (ii) the action of overstepping prescribed limit; (iii) the extravagant violation of law, decency or morality, or outrageous conduct; (iv) the overstepping of limits of moderation, such as intemperance in eating and drinking; (v) the state of exceeding or being in greater quantity or degree than usual or necessary, exuberance, superabundance, resources beyond the necessities of life, luxuries; and, (vi) the fact or state of being in greater amount or degree than is beneficial or right.

In the context of visual art, excess can be seen in the depiction of an over-abundance of objects and figures (such as the portrayal of a great number of human figures together in one space, as in the work of Hieronymus Bosch), in the depiction of objects that represent excess in terms of luxury or wealth (such as an over-abundance of expensive foods rotting on a table, as in Penny Siopis's painting entitled *Melancholia*), or in the depiction of extreme acts inflicted upon the body or by the body (such as images of extreme violence, for instance, Chris Burden's performances of the 1960s). In all the above instances the artists employed various modes of excess in their work in order to express their views on the body, society and politics of their day. It can thus be said that this thesis investigates artworks that makes statements *about* notions of excess through means of imagery that can be described as visually excessive (in terms of the subject matter that is depicted, or in terms of dense and detailed imagery).

As already mentioned, Hieronymus Bosch's famous late-fifteenth-century triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1490-1510) (Fig. 1) is an example of a representation of excess. The central panel of the painting depicts a plethora of naked human figures in a fantastical Garden of Eden interacting with food, drink and each other. Excess in *The Garden of Earthly Delights* is visually portrayed in the way that the activities within the central panel seem to continue beyond the borders of the frame. Even though the frame limits the image, the painting suggests what Umberto Eco calls a "visual list" or "list of infinities" (Eco 2009:37). The central panel of the triptych depicts figures engaged in acts that hint at sexual intercourse. With sexual imagery that is combined with images of eating and drinking, the painting alludes to gross carnality. Excess in *The Garden of Earthly Delights* is thus not only signalled by the great number of naked human figures frolicking in the garden, but also by the actions in which the figures are engaged. The work was made for private consumption only (Belting 2005:8) and thus the idea of excess was endorsing bourgeois folly as a means of entertainment.

If one turns to the series of aquatint prints by the Spanish Romantic painter Francisco Goya, *The Disasters of War*, one witnesses an instance where excess was deliberately employed to comment on a specific historical moment, that is the Spanish resistance to Napoleon. While Bosch's painting of bodies frolicking in a hedonistic garden portrays consumptive and sexual excess, Goya's prints portray excess in terms of the over-abundance of death, decay and extreme violence evident in war. Executed between 1810 to 1815 the series depicts the travesties of injustice that Goya witnessed during Spain's struggle for independence from France. The

prints depict the atrocities of the war in an especially gruesome manner. One of the prints, *The Disasters of War*# 39, *Heroic Feat! Against the Dead!* (Fig. 2), shows three corpses hanging from a tree; the head and arm of one of them have been severed and are also hanging from the tree. Goya's intention was to portray the brutal murders committed during wartime in a truthful and uncompromising manner. The shocking nature of the images of violence in relation to the human body evokes a visceral response in the viewer. The body becomes the vehicle through which extreme acts of violence are visualised. The excess evident in Goya's prints is thus different from the excess represented in Bosch's painting.

Since the development of Conceptual Art¹ in the 1960s, contemporary performance and body art, in particular, have been exploring notions of excess. Shocking, provocative and even repulsive for its audience, art that displays excessiveness in relation to the body has generally attracted wide attention. Chris Burden and Carolee Schneemann are examples of American artists who challenged the boundaries of their bodies in their work during the Conceptual Art movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Chris Burden saw personal danger as a form of artistic expression. In his 1971 performance piece *Shoot* (Fig. 3) Burden instructed an assistant to shoot him in the arm at a distance of five meters. In another piece, *Trans-fixed* (1974) (Fig. 4), Burden had himself crucified on the back of a Volkswagen (Archer 2002:103). Excess is signalled by the extremity of the situations in which the artist places his body. Burden's placing of his body in extreme and violent situations was a protest against the United States' military involvement in the Vietnam War during the 1960s and 1970s. Burden's performances of extreme violence can therefore be said to resonate with Goya's reaction to the brutalities of the Napoleonic War of the early nineteenth century.

Carolee Schneemann's artworks show different aspects of excess centred on the human body. Her performance piece *Meat Joy* (1964) (Figs. 5 & 6) consisted of a group of nearly naked dancers interacting erotically, almost ritualistically, with raw fish, chickens, sausages, wet paint and other material (Archer 2002:103). The indulgent Dionysian quality of *Meat Joy* speaks of excess on a metaphorical level.

¹ The term Conceptual Art refers to the art movement active in America roughly from 1965 to 1975. The term initially applied to the work of a group of artists using language to analyse the problems evoked by the collapse of modernism and the coincident flourishing of a range of alternatives for it (Wood 2004:11).

Excess in Schneemann's work is demonstrated through eroticism and violence, and through its comments on feminist and psychoanalytical issues.

In both Burden and Schneemann's work it is evident that excess manifests as a *conceptual impulse*. The conceptual outcome of these artists' use of excess in their work differs. Burden's intention with *Shoot* was to shock his audience in order to draw attention to the senseless violence of the Vietnam War that affected American society in the 1970s. With *Meat Joy* Schneemann staged bodies and other objects together in order to create an overwhelming atmosphere of intemperance, thereby demonstrating excess in terms of sexuality and instinctual human needs. It is through the works of early conceptual artists such as Burden and Schneemann that I trace the genesis of the contemporary phenomenon of excess in visual art.

Examples of representations of excess in art can also be found in recent South African art. A series of works that particularly speaks of excess is Penny Siopis's 'banquet' paintings of the mid-1980s. Depicting nude figures among banquet spreads overflowing with, at times, rotting food, these paintings "allegorised the excesses of white society under Apartheid" (Siopis quoted in Nuttall 2009:36). The best known of these works is *Melancholia* (1986) (Fig. 7). The large-scale, "virtuoso handling of paint" (Siopis quoted in Nuttall 2009:36) and excessive detail of the paintings also speak of excess aesthetically. Taking into account that the series was painted in the mid-1980s, at the height of the political uprisings against apartheid, the portrayal of nude white bodies (in the form of plaster sculptures in the tradition of Renaissance sculpture) among an excessive amount of luxury foods draws attention to the racially induced disparity of wealth and power in South Africa during the apartheid era.

Since the initial stages of postmodernism in art in the late 1960s we have witnessed excess in art moving from the extreme actions of Burden and Schneemann, designed to shock and provoke, to a more poetic and complex current engagement with this theme. Of late this tradition in visual art of excess in relation to the body has gained momentum and intensity in ways that are less overtly political and more poetic and ambiguous in its conceptual intent. This recent turn in the depiction and use of excess in visual art is what this thesis aims to theorise. I thus look at excess evident in artworks that display notions of transgression and subversion in combination with the poetic.²

² In his book *Aftershock: The Ethics of Contemporary Art* (2009), Kieran Cashell defines aesthetic transgression as "any act of violation presented under the alibi of art" (2009:1).

The study is focused on South African artist Steven Cohen's recent video and performance, *Golgotha* (2007-9) and Swedish artist Nathalie Djurberg's video installation, *Experimentet* (2009). I chose to investigate these two works because both speak of excess in so many ways. Upon my first viewing of *Golgotha* I identified links between the meanings behind Cohen's performance and various psychoanalytical and philosophical theories related to excess. My initial experience of *Golgotha* encapsulates one of the core arguments that I attempt to articulate – I was immediately repulsed but simultaneously drawn to his provocative performance. I chose to analyse *Experimentet* because Djurberg's animations share visual and conceptual similarities with my own art practice. Upon viewing *Experimentet* I was instantly drawn to the intricate and strange environment that Djurberg created with her video installation. I am drawn to, and inclined to create, artworks that function together as an installation, thereby creating a fantasy environment for viewers to immerse themselves in. In my analysis of Djurberg's *Experimentet* and Cohen's *Golgotha* I attempt to identify overlapping and dissimilar notions of excess that can be observed in both works.

Nathalie Djurberg's *Experimentet*

Nathalie Djurberg is a Swedish artist who lives and works in Berlin. She is best known for her claymation³ films that are simultaneously delightful and subversive in their use of the 'innocent' medium of animation to depict human savagery. As a result of its association with child's play and children's television shows, Djurberg's use of claymation subverts the medium. Her disturbing stories are conveyed by a cast of puppets that act out scenes of eroticism and violence. The point of focus, the sculpture and video installation *Experimentet*, was developed for the *Making Worlds* exhibition at the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2009.

Experimentet is a large-scale multimedia installation that consists of a fantastical garden of plant-like sculptures and three animated films projected onto separate screens (Fig. 8). The sculptures and video screens were installed in a dark enclosed space about the size of two classrooms, with the sculptures spotlighted to increase dramatic effect. Upon entering the dark room the viewer is immediately confronted by Djurberg's strange life-size sculptures of unknown plants (Figs. 9 & 10), and by the

³ Claymation is a form of stop motion animation where each animated piece, either a character or an object, is made of a malleable substance, usually Plasticine clay.

ominous-sounding music of the German experimental musician Hans Berg, composed for the films.⁴ A hundred and thirty plant-like sculptures inhabit the dark installation space, with some towering above the heads of spectators. The sculptures are made of materials such as latex, silicon, plasticine, wire gauze and wood, and, standing on platforms, they create a path that seems to direct the viewer through a labyrinth. Some of the monstrous flower-like sculptures bleed wax onto the ground (Fig. 11), while the rest of the plastic plant-forms are “vulgarly swollen in a way signifying Eden as pornography instead of eroticism” (Liew 2010). At first glance the colourful plant-like sculptures may seem playful and naïve, but it soon becomes clear that Djurberg has subverted this fantastical ‘garden’ with visceral flowers and plants.

Amongst the plant-like sculptures are three separate video screens installed which project different film-loops (Fig. 12). The three claymation films are individually entitled *Greed*, *Forest* and *Cave*⁵. The film that is projected the largest, *Greed*, shows three Catholic priests taking turns in hiding a naked girl under their robes (Fig. 13). *Forest* shows the figures of a man and woman, both naked, fearsomely disfiguring each other while fighting their way through a dangerous forest environment (Fig. 14). *Cave* shows a naked woman mutilating her own body (Fig. 15). In the catalogue essay for the *Making Worlds* exhibition her curiously eroticised animations are described as representing “sexual excess, in this case, without the sex” (Birnbbaum & Volz 2009:40). The absurdity of the installation as a whole is encapsulated by Berg’s haunting electronic music composed for Djurberg’s films. It sets the tempo and builds the intensity that binds together the experience of *Experimentet*.

Steven Cohen’s *Golgotha*

Steven Cohen, a South African-born artist of Jewish descent, currently lives and works in France. He is renowned for his provocative performances in the public realm and in the gallery and theatre space. With his public interventions he draws attention to issues that are normally marginalised in society. In his previous performances Cohen used his own identity as a gay Jewish man as a point of

⁴ Hans Berg is a musician working and living in Berlin. The soundtrack he composed for the installation *Experimentet* is an experimental six-channel surround system.

⁵ Each animation is a digital video: *Greed*, 10 minutes 45 seconds; *Forest*, 7 minutes 27 seconds; *Cave*, 6 minutes 39 seconds.

departure. His more recent film, *Golgotha*,⁶ however, does not reflect issues regarding his gay Jewish identity in the ostentatious and sexually shocking way that characterised his previous performances⁷. It is a rather a subtler, but still very theatrical, reflection on aspects of Western capitalist society that appal him, and his attempt to deal with death and trauma.

At the start of the film the audience is introduced to Cohen's white male and ageing body. Set in a white studio, it shows Cohen dressed in a Baroque-style corset made of wedding crowns, velvet and mirrors. His face is masked with glitter make-up and butterfly wings that remind one of the *vanitas* symbols of the Renaissance (Fig. 17). This scene is followed by the footage of Cohen's performative intervention in New York City (Fig. 18). The idea for the performance originated with Cohen's discovery of two human skulls for sale in a shop in Soho, New York. Also a remarkable crafter of objects, Cohen skilfully transformed the skulls into a pair of very high stilettos, which he calls "skullettos" (Cohen 2010) (Fig. 19). He wears this ghoulish pair of shoes in a pilgrimage reminiscent of the Stations of the Cross – the road to Golgotha, the place of Christ's crucifixion. Wearing a stockbroker's suit with the *vanitas* mask and the 'skullettos', Cohen starts his journey at Wall Street (Fig. 20), the nucleus of global economic imperialism, proceeds through Times Square (Fig. 21), and ends at Ground Zero – the site of the bombed World Trade Centre. Cohen performs a macabre dance, almost a lament for the lives lost in 9/11, with the skulls on the marble platform at Ground Zero (Fig. 22). The film concludes with footage of Cohen cradling the skullettos still attached to his feet (Fig. 23).

THEORISING NOTIONS OF EXCESS IN CONTEMPORARY VISUAL ART

The aim of my study is twofold: firstly, to situate within a theoretical framework the phenomenon of excess represented through means of the body in contemporary art; and, secondly, to situate my own art practice within this framework. This thesis helps me to understand my need and desire to create artworks that incorporate

⁶ *Golgotha* is a single-channel HD video running for 20 minutes 8 seconds.

⁷ His identity as a gay man is, for instance, not reiterated by objects protruding from his anus. This can be seen in his 2007 performance *Cleaning Time (Vienna)...a shandeh und a chapeh (a shame and disgrace)* in which Cohen scrubs the pavements and streets of Heldenplatz in Vienna with a diamond protruding from his anus (Fig. 16). Heldenplatz is a site where Jews were forced to scrub the public square with toothbrushes during the Nazi period (Panther 2007:76).

representations of excess in relation to the body, and it assists my comprehension of the broader context within which my own art-making is situated.

Simply put, the aims of this study are: (1) to analyse the way in which excess is represented by means of the body in Djurberg's *Experimentet* and Cohen's *Golgotha*; (2) to outline excess as a phenomenon prevalent in contemporary visual art; and (3) to provide a theoretical framework in which I can situate my own current arts practice.

To develop the theoretical framework for the study I have engaged with the ideas of various theorists who have written on the notion of excess. By moving between philosophical and psychoanalytic writings on excess, I examine the various ways to unpack meaning in both Djurberg's *Experimentet* and Cohen's *Golgotha*, both of which have a particular affinity for representing excess through the use of the body.

I hope to provide a comprehensive theoretical account of the notion of excess in visual art in this review of the artworks under discussion primarily by consulting the writings of the following twentieth-century theorists: Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin; French psychoanalytical theorist Jacques Lacan; French writer George Bataille; French writer Guy Debord; contemporary American theorist Frederic Jameson; and contemporary French feminist theorist Luce Irigaray. I only briefly introduce particular sections of their writings that are relevant to the topic of excess. This study is therefore not an exhaustive analysis of these theorists' works, but rather a purposive use of their various philosophical and psychological ideas on excess in relation to the two artworks under discussion.

As mentioned in the beginning of the introduction, excess centred on the human body implies extreme representations of the human form – including the grotesque body, the fragmented body, the body spectacle and the body mimicked to excess. This investigation into the different representations of the human form is approached from a philosophical angle, drawing on the writings on the grotesque body by Mikhail Bakhtin, as well as incorporating a psychological angle, with particular reference to Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytical notion of the fragmented body, or *corps morcé*.

Representations of excess centred on the body do not only entail investigations into the representation of the human figure, but also an analysis of their spectacle value. Instances where the human body is treated as a commodity provoke debate on issues related to capitalism; therefore this study also incorporates Guy Debord's notion of the 'spectacle'. At this point the discussion turns towards a cultural critique

of capitalism, with specific focus on Fredric Jameson's view of the postmodern and the influence of capitalism on cultural production.

Certain writings by George Bataille are also central to my investigation of excess as a phenomenon in contemporary visual art. I incorporate two distinctive theories by Bataille in my outline of excess: firstly, his enquiry into the notion of expenditure; and secondly, his writings on taboo and transgression and how they simultaneously attract and repulse us.

The investigation of representations of excess in relation to the body takes a feminist turn with the writing of Luce Irigaray. I study Irigaray's concept of the role of excess in mimesis in relation to representations of the female body.

The study as a whole can provide only a brief introduction to some of the philosophical issues and psychoanalytical theories that might arise around the topic of representations of excess in relation to the body. My investigation of excess in visual art functions primarily as an exploration of the ways in which excess can be represented visually by means of the body. It is not an attempt to draw definitive conclusions regarding society's interaction or fascination with, or repulsion from, images of excess, but rather simply an exploration of the role of excess in contemporary visual art. This is achieved by adopting a number of theorists' viewpoints to set up a hybrid interpretive framework from which to investigate representations of excess in the artworks under discussion (including my own art practice).

Djurberg's and Cohen's works are discussed as examples of excess as a phenomenon in contemporary visual art. In both *Experimentet* and *Golgotha* representations of the body are employed in order to comment on specific issues related to excess. This thesis, however, only proposes some of the possible ways to read the meanings of *Golgotha* and *Experimentet*. The analyses of these two artworks are divided into four chapters, each topic related to a specific kind of representation of excess in relation to the body.

Chapter One, *Excess becoming flesh: Grotesque realism, degradation and the fragmented body*, theorises representations of excess in the context of the body in general. In this chapter I examine a specific kind of representation of the body that is evident in both of the works investigated, namely the grotesque body. Mikhail Bakhtin developed the notion of grotesque realism in his book *Rabelais and His World* (1984). Bakhtin coins the term 'grotesque realism' as a literary mode that describes

the interaction between the social and the literary, as it is exemplified in François Rabelais's sixteenth-century novel, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. Grotesque realism is also a term that explains the meaning of the body and the material bodily lower stratum (Bakhtin 1984:303-5). *Cave*, one of Djurberg's three animations in *Experimentet*, is discussed as a contemporary representation of the grotesque body.

The second part of the chapter investigates degradation, as Bakhtin identifies this term as the essential principle of grotesque realism (1984:19). In the context of Bakhtin's analysis, degradation concerns materiality: as the deterioration of the body and social processes. Both *Golgotha* and *Experimentet* present viewers with extreme forms of the human body and these grotesque bodily forms are highly degrading. Both examples, particularly *Golgotha*, show degradation in excess. I argue that these degraded forms of the body can possibly lead to forms of regeneration – that is, the social and emotional restoration of that which is deteriorated.

The human imagination seems to be enthralled by images of the human body in fragmented form. Chapter One therefore also briefly investigates Jacques Lacan's notion of the fragmented body, or *corps morcelé*, to explain the human imagination's fearful fascination with images of a fragmented body. The notion of the fragmented body shares characteristics with the grotesque body, as the body depicted in the tradition of grotesque realism is often incomplete or fragmented. The end of this chapter questions why images of the fragmented body – such as Djurberg's plasticine puppet dismemberment or Cohen's walking on skulls – are so shocking. This section therefore provides a psychoanalytical perspective on the effect that images of fragmented, or grotesque, human bodies possibly have on viewers.

Chapter Two, *The body spectacle as a cultural critique of capitalism*, explores how Cohen's use of the 'skulletos' in *Golgotha* can be read as a cultural critique of capitalism. Cohen's performance in New York City can be seen as a spectacle centred on the body to comment on a specific kind of capitalist excess. In the context of the current investigation of representations of excess, I situate an analysis of *Golgotha* as a critique of capitalism. Cohen visually expresses his concern with the excess of materialism by displaying excess in his 'expensive' outfit and his walking down Wall Street and Times Square. In *Society of the Spectacle* (written 1967 and translated 1970) Guy Debord defines the spectacle as the dominating phenomenon in societies where capitalist conditions of production reign (Debord 1977:No.1). As mentioned previously in the brief introduction to *Golgotha*, Cohen's performance stemmed from the discovery of two human skulls for sale in a shop in New York.

With Cohen's act of buying and then transforming the skulls into a cultural product, he is commenting on the excesses prevalent in material society.

George Bataille presents a philosophical enquiry into the notion of expenditure as a critique of accumulation in his book *The Accursed Share: Volume I* (written in 1949 and translated 1991). The status of excess or expenditure is a pivotal point in this text, as Bataille was of the opinion that capital accumulation is a malevolent force that distorts social relations. Cohen's performance in New York speaks of a critique of capitalism as Bataille wrote about it in the mid-twentieth century. In this chapter I also look at the tradition of *vanitas* painting and *memento mori* in relation to *Golgotha*, as representations of the human skull are incorporated into artworks to remind viewers of the meaninglessness of material life and the transient nature of vanity.

Lastly, I situate the discussion on what I call the 'body spectacle' in the context of Fredric Jameson's view of the postmodern, as explained in his book *Postmodernism, Or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991). In his outline of the development of capitalism and its influence on cultural products, Jameson identifies a specific feature of postmodernism that he calls the "waning of affect" (Jameson 1991:6). He ascribes this condition to the "new depthlessness" (Jameson 1991:6) in art and culture attributed to the development of postmodernism. I view Jameson's account of the 'waning of affect' as one of the possible outcomes of representations of excess in contemporary visual art. Jameson suggests that the waning of affect is, possibly, best approached by way of the human figure; therefore representations of excess centred on the body can be said to articulate something of Jameson's 'waning of affect' attributed to the development of postmodernism and capitalism. In utilising representations of excess in relation to the human body to illustrate something of Jameson's waning of affect, the body spectacle situates itself as a critique of capitalism.

Chapter Three, *Excess and mimesis in representations of the female body*, explores representations of excess in relation to the female body. A study of the representations of the female body is relevant to Djurberg's work, as the grotesque female body is a recurring theme in her animations. My own subject position as a young female practitioner of art is another factor necessitating an investigation on representations of the female body. In this chapter I adopt a psychoanalytical approach with an investigation of Luce Irigaray's concept of the role of excess in mimesis. Originating in Greek thought, the notion of mimesis connects ideas about

artistic representation to more general assertions about human social behaviour, and to the way we interact with others and our environment (Potolsky 2006:2). Irigaray's philosophy of sexual difference has an effect on the production of meaning in the realm of the visual and, consequently, the visual aesthetic (Robinson 2006:8). Irigaray's work therefore needs to be understood as it relates to the practices and structures that inform the production and reception of visual representation. In this chapter I specifically focus on Irigaray's writings on mimesis and related terms as she presents the issue in her book *This Sex which is Not One* (1985). In this text she presents the strategy of mimicry as a means to liberate the feminine. Irigaray mimics the symbolic representation of the female body to excess so as to expose the structures inherent in patriarchy and phallocentrism. Hilary Robertson argues in her book *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray: The politics of art by women* (2006) that mimesis and its related terms are crucial concepts for analysing how we learn to behave in a manner appropriate for our social structures, and how we create art (2006:8). Djurberg's three films in *Experimentet* are referred to here in order to explain how the symbolic representation of the female body is mimicked to excess.

Chapter Four investigates the experiences possibly elicited in spectators by representations of excess in relation to the body. Entitled *The attraction-repulsion paradox in response to the depiction of excess*, this chapter explains, with reference to specific writings by George Bataille and Mikhail Bakhtin, the paradoxical stance that viewers may adopt. I suggest that the 'attraction-repulsion paradox' is a possible reaction evoked by viewing *Experimentet* and *Golgotha*. Here I argue, with reference to both artworks, that the representation of excess is characterised by the paradox of simultaneously seducing and disgusting audiences. Both artworks interrogate notions of the taboo and aim at provoking visceral, or instinctual, responses. Bataille's writings on the taboo and transgression, and their function in society are examined. Bataille explains how the taboo attracts and repulses us, and he defines it as a prohibition relating to social customs that are sacred and to forbidden acts based on moral judgement, and, at times, religious beliefs. Ambivalent images also instigate a paradoxical stance. Bakhtin insists that grotesque imagery is characterised by an embodiment of incompleteness. The ambivalent nature, or "unfinished becoming" (Bakhtin 1984:118) of grotesque and carnivalesque imagery can be observed in both *Experimentet* and *Golgotha*.

In Chapter Four I contend that artworks that represent excess evoke a visceral response. What all the artworks mentioned so far, from Bosch to Burden, have in common is that they evoke visceral reactions in viewers. Kathryn Smith talks about

“visceral” reactions in the viewing of artworks (Smith 1998:34). Visceral reactions in the viewing of artworks are reactions that are emotionally, as opposed to rationally, determined. “In this ‘visceral reaction’ we are at once repulsed, but compelled to look.” (Smith 1998:35). I argue that viewers are drawn to art that displays excess because images of excess generally attract and repulse us at the same time. I suggest that once this immediate visceral, or paradoxical, response is understood, we can begin to understand the complexity of the inner workings of representations of excess.

The last chapter, *Representations of excess in the exhibition ‘Excess Becoming Flesh’*, investigates representations of excess in relation to the body within my own art practice. The theoretical framework established in the above chapters is reflected in the conceptualisation of the artworks in *Excess Becoming Flesh*. The analysis of *Golgotha* and *Experimentet* is placed within the context provided by an international global art circuit. However, in the discussion of my own work I situate the notion of excess in contemporary art in a South African context.

The artworks in the exhibition vary in media. One of the works, *Saturated Spectacle (After Hieronymus Bosch)* (2011) (Fig. 24), is a large-scale collage appropriated as a contemporary version of the central panel of Bosch’s triptych, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. As previously mentioned, the central panel of Bosch’s triptych shows a fantastical world where sexually liberated naked figures frolic among bizarre fauna and flora. The painting has been described as a “an exotic derangement that turns us all into voyeurs, as a place filled with the intoxicating air of perfect liberty.” (Belting 2005:7). In today’s Westernised world we are constantly exposed to images of excess, thereby turning us all, willingly or not, into voyeurs. By appropriating Bosch’s eccentric view of ‘utopia’ by means of found images, I hope to facilitate critical reflection of the excess prevalent in contemporary culture.

In conclusion, this thesis reveals how the human body is the preferred vehicle for Cohen, Djurberg and myself to represent excess in visual art. Notions of excess are explored in the work of these artists as a means to comment on certain aspects of our contemporary existence. By investigating how excess and the body are represented with reference to theoretical enquiries into grotesque realism, the body spectacle as a critique of capitalism, the mimicry of the female body, and the attraction-repulsion paradox, I hope to contribute, by means of this thesis, to a discourse on the notion of excess in contemporary art, both locally and abroad.

CHAPTER ONE

Excess becoming flesh: Grotesque realism, degradation and the fragmented body

This chapter investigates the way in which representations of excess in relation to the body are visualised in Djurberg's *Experimentet* and Cohen's *Golgotha*. The artworks are analysed with reference to theoretical writings about representations of the body. The discussion is focused on Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of grotesque realism, but also introduces Jacques Lacan's theory of the fragmented body, or *corps morcelé*. The chapter theorises representations of excess in the context of representations of the body, as this kind of representation is evident in both of the artworks under discussion. Prevalent in both artworks is the depiction of degradation, which Bakhtin identifies as the essential principle of grotesque realism. Observable in both artworks are representations of the fragmented body; therefore I also investigate Lacan's notion of the *corps morcelé* to provide an understanding of the human imagination's anxious fascination with images of a fragmented body. The degrading portrayal of the female body mutilating her reproductive organs in Djurberg's animation *Cave*, one of the three animations installed in *Experimentet*, is analysed as a contemporary representation of Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque body. In *Golgotha*, also, a sense of degradation is overt. The gesture of walking on human skulls communicates degradation in excess. The chapter explores how degraded forms of the fragmented body are represented (as seen in Djurberg's mutilated female body and Cohen's macabre skull shoes) and how these degraded forms could possibly lead to forms of regeneration, an important aspect to Bakhtin's idea of the grotesque body.

Before turning to Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque I want to briefly refer to Wolfgang Kayser's definition of the term in art. In *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* (1963) Kayser provides a definition of the word 'grotesque' on the basis of what he says is a "somewhat sketchy etymological history of the word" (Kayser 1963:10). Kayser is concerned with the individual experiences of the grotesque as well as its historical occurrences. He states that the historical study of the grotesque and theoretical mastery of the phenomenon are significant for an understanding of modern art. A

knowledge of the historical origins and forms of the grotesque is still very much relevant in an appreciation of certain forms of contemporary art, particularly in the forms of art produced within the framework of the phenomenon of excess. For this reason some of the forms of the historical grotesque are examined as they attempt to articulate the visual manifestations of excess. A complete delineation of the history of the grotesque is, however, impossible within the scope of my research; therefore I focus only on certain aspects of it, particularly in the way it relates to the two artworks investigated.

The word 'grotesque' is derived from the Italian words *la grottesca* and *grottesco* referring to *grotta*, which means 'cave' (Kayser 1963:19). The original Italian words were coined to describe a certain ancient ornamental style of painting that were discovered during fifteenth-century excavations in Rome and later in other parts of Italy.⁸ These ornamental paintings depicted a playful amalgamation of plant, animal and human forms; they can therefore be seen as early forms of fantasy images (Bakhtin 1884:31). Kayser identifies two basic types of the grotesque: the "fantastic" grotesque with its dream states, and the subversive "satiric" grotesque that plays with masquerading (1963:189).

In the concluding chapter of Kayser's book, entitled *An Attempt to Define the Nature of the Grotesque*, he establishes the grotesque as a comprehensive structural principle of works of art. He proposes that a clear comprehension of grotesque imagery necessitates not only an analysis of its structural properties, but also an awareness of its reception. However, in stating this, he also warns of a definition of the grotesque based exclusively on its affect (in terms of its psychological impact). Essentially, Kayser defines the grotesque as a structure, summarising its nature in the phrase, "the grotesque is the estranged world" (Kayser 1963:184). He draws an analogy with the fairy tale world, as it can also be regarded as strange and alien. The fairy tale world is, however, not estranged. In other words, the elements operating within it that are familiar to us do not suddenly become strange and threatening. Kayser suggests that it is our world that needs to be transformed, as abruptness and shock are essential elements of the grotesque. The grotesque affects us as our familiar world becomes hostile and our normal ways of living are threatened. As a result, we are unable to orientate ourselves in the alienated world, because it is

⁸ The 'caves' in which this hitherto unknown style of painting was discovered were in fact rooms and corridors of the *Domus Area*, the uncompleted palace complex started by Nero after the great fire of Rome in 64 AD (Harpham 2006:28).

absurd (Kayser 1963:184). It must be noted that Kayser believed that the grotesque is not concerned with individual actions or the destruction of moral order – it is rather “primarily the expression of our failure to orient ourselves in the physical universe” (Kayser 1963:185). Furthermore, Kayser states that in his examination of grotesque art and literature, it is clear that “the grotesque is a play with the absurd” (1963:187).⁹

Djurberg’s films can be seen as grotesque in this sense, as it plays with the absurd. Stop-motion animation, particularly when it is made of plasticine, is generally associated with fairy tale naïveté, but Djurberg’s rendering of the medium is far removed from the presumed innocence of the fairy tale world.¹⁰ Djurberg’s films subvert the medium of claymation by shocking viewers with visually explicit imagery – thus imagery that would normally not be associated with claymation. In this respect it reminds us of Kayser’s description of the grotesque in relation to the fairy tale world. The fairy tale, as a strange and unusual world, differs from the grotesque, because it is not necessarily threatening. Kayser summarises the grotesque as the estranged world (1963:184). He explains that the world of the fairy tale could also be regarded as strange and alien, “yet its world is not estranged, that is to say, the elements in it which are familiar and natural to us do not suddenly turn out to be strange and ominous” (Kayser 1963:184). The grotesque, different from the fairy tale, arises when the things that were familiar to us suddenly become strange and hostile (Kayser 1963:184). Kayser (1963:184) states that “suddenness and surprise are essential elements of the grotesque”. As mentioned in the introduction, Djurberg’s crudely rendered figures act out transgressive social behaviours that possibly leave viewers feeling uncomfortable. The medium of clay allows depictions of the human form to morph into abject¹¹ deformations. The films lure in the viewer

⁹ Bakhtin (1984:48), however, criticises Kayser’s fairy tale analogy by stating that it can be applied only to certain modern embodiments of the grotesque, adding that it is not completely adequate for the Romantic period. Bakhtin highlights Kayser’s insistence on the element of alienation evident in the grotesque, but stresses the “bodily awareness of another world” (1984:48) as of great importance in the grotesque.

¹⁰ Examples of children’s claymation are well-known animated films such as *Wallace & Gromit* and DVDs available on amazon.com such *Fairy Tale Favourites* (Animated and Claymation).

¹¹ As formulated by the French theorist Julia Kristeva, the ‘abject’ is that which disturbs the self by provoking disgust, loathing, fear or repulsion. Integrated into the realm of the psychic, the abject constitutes the excessive aspects (Buchanan 2010:3). For Kristeva, abjection is the state of rejecting what is other to oneself. Therefore she sees it as one of the most fundamental processes of the subject in process (McAfee 2004:46).

with the presumed depiction of innocence, but soon astonish their audience when the characters suddenly become deformed and engage in acts of sexualised violence.

The way in which Djurberg's animated figures slip into abject deformations relates to the historical definition of the grotesque. Kathryn Smith's *The Limits of Excess* (1998) links contemporary theories of the abject to the historical notion of the grotesque: "like the abject, the grotesque is (and historically, has been) 'needed' as an 'other' for normalcy in that it 'produces' the codes from which normalcy is constructed" (Smith 1998:10). In my analysis of Djurberg's work I also maintain that the grotesque is the historical predecessor to the visual forms of abjection.

In viewing Djurberg's installation *Experimentet* at the Venice Biennale in 2009, my thoughts inescapably turned to Bakhtin's writings on the folk-festive culture of the Middle Ages as theorised in his book *Rabelais and His World* (1984). The first impression upon viewing one of Djurberg's films is often that they are a gross exaggeration (in terms of bodily features and of actions performed by the figures). According to Bakhtin, "exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness are generally considered fundamental attributes of the grotesque style" (1984:303). Even the physical appearance of the plasticine puppets – with the expressive marks of the artist's hand visible and with exaggerated bodily forms – relates to the visual characteristics of grotesque realism (Figs. 25 & 26). The physicality and tactility of the work impose on the viewer and, together with the grotesque bodily shapes and disturbing acts of violence performed by the puppets, make for an engrossing experience.

Within the larger context of the installation *Experimentet*, *Cave* is the film that best exemplifies Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque body. Upon entering the dark installation space, viewers were first confronted with Djurberg's strange life-size plant sculptures that occupied the space. Being colourful and visceral in the way that some plants seemed to 'bleed' wax, the sculptures prepared viewers for the disturbing acts of body dismemberment that were going to follow in the viewing of *Cave*. An unsettling soundtrack of ominous drum beats and offbeat experimental sounds could be heard in the installation space, contributing to the overall atmosphere of malaise that Djurberg created with *Experimentet*. All the elements operating within the installation space thus contribute to creating an atmosphere of the grotesque world.

The unsettling acts performed by Djurberg's boisterous puppets remind one of Bakhtin's account of Rabelais's sixteenth-century novel in which the material bodily

principle plays a predominant role. Bakhtin's idea of the "material bodily principle" (1984:18) consists of images of the human body interacting with its food, drink, defecation and sexual drives, mostly offered in extremely exaggerated forms. *Cave* is the film in *Experimentet* that most aptly demonstrates a contemporary representation of the 'material bodily principle' in its depiction of the female grotesque. In the opening scene of the film viewers are introduced to a young nude woman with all her body parts intact, but with a grotesquely bloated belly (Fig. 27). The next scene shows how the woman reclines on a Victorian couch reminiscent of psychoanalysis in a cave of faecal stalactites, while bits of her body start breaking off and attacking her (Fig. 28). Eventually she lies on the ground without legs and a monstrously swollen vagina, and reluctantly drinks her own milk from her torn-off breast (Fig. 29). It seems as though the figure rapes herself in a schizophrenic terror – her limbs have a will of their own, abusing, and ultimately destroying her own body by dismembering itself (Fig. 15).

In Bakhtin's analysis of the grotesque body (1984:317) he reveals a succession of different body canons he asserts have occurred in European history since medieval times. According to Bakhtin, the official culture of the Middle Ages was ultimately dependent on ideologies and images that stressed the central, unchanging and monolithic qualities of social organisation and the cosmos as a whole. In contrast to this, objects that were instilled with the grotesque or festive folk-humour overstepped the boundaries of officialdom and became linked with other things. From this comes the connotation of the pregnant, unfinished body: "the endless chain of bodily life retains the parts in which one link joins the other, in which the life of one body is born from the death of the preceding, older one" (Bakhtin 1984:318). This 'unfinished becoming' gives the grotesque body its radically ambivalent nature. It can be said that this is visualised in Djurberg's animation of the seemingly pregnant and changing female body in *Cave*. Bakhtin views the 'unfinished becoming' of grotesque imagery as a positive force, since the main imagery in folk-festive culture includes those that represent abundance, growth and fertility – thereby, according to him, overriding the dullness of everyday life with excessive festive celebration.

As mentioned, Djurberg's hand-made plasticine puppets are rough and expressive – certain body parts, such as eyes, buttocks and bellies are overstated and exaggerated, and their movements are wild and uninhibited. In the Romantic writer

Victor Hugo's literary appreciation¹² of Rabelais's work he offers variations on the theme of the material bodily stratum and bodily topography in line with Romantic concepts. Hugo believed the belly to be central to Rabelais's topography – an analogy can be drawn with this and Djurberg's depiction of the female form in *Cave*. The fundamental function of the belly is paternity and maternity. According to Bakhtin, Hugo correctly understood the role of the bodily lower stratum as an organising principle, but he also views this principle on an abstract moral level. Hugo (quoted in Bakhtin 1984:126) presents the grotesque image of a "serpent inside man", and he talks about how man's bowels "tempt, betray and punish". Hugo interpreted the destructive force of the topological lower stratum in ethical and philosophical terms (Bakhtin 1984:126). In other words, he noticed the essential link between eating, drinking, swallowing, laughter and death, which can be traced back to the functions of the belly. In the light of this discussion, it is interesting to observe that Djurberg's clay puppets often possess grossly exaggerated bellies, and that they are often involved in acts of eating, drinking, copulation and disfiguration.

In the light of the figure in *Cave* being forced to drink her breast milk, the discussion can turn towards the scatological.¹³ Scatological liberties are part of grotesque realism, as they played an important role in the medieval carnivals described by Bakhtin. Drenching and drowning in urine is a recurring theme in Rabelais's novel. Bakhtin describes the ancient gesture where 'to besmirch' means 'to debase'. For Bakhtin, grotesque debasement is always concerned with the material lower bodily stratum (the zone with the sexual organs). "Therefore debasement did not besmirch with mud but with excrement and urine." (Bakhtin 1984:147). This scatological drives associated with traditional debasing gestures in grotesque realism can be related to Djurberg's violent 'self rape' scene in *Cave* where the figure's face is smeared with her own breast milk.

The animation *Greed*, also part of Djurberg's installation, as already mentioned, also displays scatological liberties. An overweight naked woman (Fig. 25) feeds her breast milk to two aging monks. They greedily suck at her large breast, while milk

¹² Hugo did not devote a book or an article to Rabelais's work, but he commented on it throughout his writings. His most detailed discussion of Rabelais's literature is included in his book on Shakespeare (Bakhtin 1984:125).

¹³ Scatology is the study of, or the preoccupation with, excrement or obscenity (The *South African Concise Oxford Dictionary* 2002. Sv, 'scatology').

flows copiously from her breasts (Fig. 30). This sequence in the animation will be more extensively discussed in Chapter Four.

In *Cave* the facial features of the plasticine puppet and the 'tubes' of milk are playfully exaggerated to the point where they almost become caricature (Fig. 31). Despite this allusion to playful caricature, the image remains highly disturbing. According to Bakhtin, "exaggeration becomes caricature", when an abstract idea distorts the nature of the grotesque image, when it "transforms the centre of gravity to a 'moral' meaning" (1984:62). In other words, the fundamental force of the image becomes negative once exaggeration becomes caricature. Bakhtin believed that the nature of the grotesque – as positive because it is associated with the regenerating forces of the material lower bodily stratum – becomes distorted where it is used to illustrate an abstract idea. This is possibly the case with *Cave*. The figure drinking from (and dismembering) her body does not possess any positive values. On the contrary, we as viewers are left in a paradoxical state of mesmerising disgust. There is no light at the open end of this dark cave – the main force drawing the viewer is the sheer excessiveness of the spectacle.

Despite the shocking qualities of Djurberg's moving images, viewers' initial reaction to her animations is often of amusement. Bakhtin talks about the "distrust of the serious tone and confidence in the truth of laughter" (Bakhtin 1984:95) that prevailed in the medieval carnivals. This laughter had a "spontaneous, elemental character" and it was believed that "fear never lurks behind laughter and that hypocrisy and lies never laugh but wear a serious mask" (Bakhtin 1984:95). Therefore laughter in the carnival spirit of medieval times was not associated with dogmas and with fear, but rather with strength and the act of procreation – with birth, fertility, renewal and abundance. Food and drink, the people's earthy immortality and the promise of the future were all related to laughter. Therefore seriousness was distrusted, while trust was placed in festive laughter (Bakhtin 1984:95). Certain links can be drawn with the amusing aspects of Djurberg's animations and Bakhtin's account of festive laughter in medieval times. Djurberg clearly shows a degree of scepticism about the 'seriousness' of topical socio-political debates, but in reflecting on these issues, however amusing they may seem, one cannot ignore their sombre impact.

As part of this discussion of Djurberg's use of grotesque imagery, I turn to Michael Gardiner for an account of the sensory and carnal aspects of the carnivalesque in his essay *Bakhtin and the Metaphorics of Perception* (1999). In Bakhtinian terms the carnivalesque is the celebration of the grotesque. Gardiner writes that Bakhtin in

Rabelais and his World, in contrast to his previous writings, turns his attention to “the boisterous, disruptive and libidinous qualities of popular cultural forms and the body,” and that he locates this within “an historical period marked by the collapse of medievalism and the emergence of a more open and humanistic Renaissance culture” (Gardiner 1999:67). In refusing to accept the severe discipline, abstention and ‘afterlife’ spirituality of medievalism, the folk-festive culture of Rabelais’s world was driven by the sensual, bodily and physical aspects of human life within the context of everyday social interactions.

In terms of the types of costume and make-up donned by Cohen in *Golgotha* (Figs. 32 & 33) and his interaction with the people in the streets of New York, it is tempting to consider them in relation to Bakhtin’s notion of the medieval carnival. “Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people,” writes Bakhtin, “they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people” (1984:7). Cohen seems to create his own, albeit solitary, carnival with his outrageous outfit and his pilgrimage through the some of the most important streets of New York City.

One of the most prominent characteristics of grotesque realism, a feature that can be seen in both *Golgotha* and *Experimentet*, is degradation. Bakhtin identifies degradation as the essential principle of grotesque realism, as “the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity” (Bakhtin 1984:20). An understanding of the term degradation is important in an analysis of both Djurberg’s and Cohen’s work, particularly in *Golgotha*, where degradation takes visual form in the skull shoes that the artist wears throughout his performance. The use of the ‘skullettos’ literally lowers all that is high, spiritual and ideal to the material level where earth and body become one. *Golgotha* visualises degradation by means of the grotesque form that Cohen’s body assumes together with the ‘skullettos’, thereby demonstrating the physically of the bodily aspect of degradation. Bakhtin stresses the fact that the grotesque body is a “body in act of becoming” and that it “swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world” (1984:317). In Cohen’s use of real human skulls as shoes, he literary lowers that with which the humanity and intellect of a person are associated (a person’s head), and degrades it by ‘merging’ it with the ground, the earth. I think it is relevant to examine *Golgotha* as a work that operates within the realm of the grotesque to illustrate the possibility of regeneration that, for Bakhtin, runs parallel to excessive degradation.

Gardiner writes: “The grotesque stresses the sensual, bodily aspects of human existence. All that is abstract and idealised is degraded and ‘lowered’ by the transferral of these images and symbols to the material, profane level, which represents the ‘indissoluble unity’ of earth and body” (1999:68). Bakhtin (1984:21) allocates topological meanings to the term degradation: ‘downward’ is associated with the earth, and ‘upward’ with heaven. Earth is identified as an element that “devours, swallows up” (relating to the grave, the womb), but also as an element of “birth” (relating to the maternal breasts). The cosmic aspect of ‘upward’ and ‘downward’ runs parallel to their bodily aspect. Therefore degradation means “coming down to earth”, as earth is a force that can swallow up and give birth simultaneously. “To degrade is to bury, to sow, and to kill simultaneously, in order to bring forth something more and better.” (Bakhtin 1984:21). Therefore Bakhtin’s particular conception of degradation is fundamentally a positive one, because regeneration is a consequence of absolute degeneration.

According to Bakhtin, to degrade also means to concern oneself with the lower parts of the body (what Bakhtin calls the ‘lower stratum of the body’), the belly and the reproductive organs – therefore relating to defecation, copulation, conception, pregnancy and death. “Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive negative aspect, but also a regenerating one” (Bakhtin 1984:21). Grotesque realism, as a force that degrades in both the cosmic and bodily sense of the word, is thus “always conceiving”. The visualisation of physical degradation makes images look disproportionate, and thus excessive. *Rabelais and his World* is rich with graphic descriptions. Acts of defecation and bodily expulsion, sex, birth, eating and drinking all perform major symbolic roles in the texts and practices of medieval folk culture. As mentioned, Bakhtin believed that the nature of the grotesque is positive, because it is associated with regenerating forces of the material lower bodily stratum. Djurberg’s *Experimentet* visualises degradation by means of grotesque bodily forms, therefore demonstrating the physicality of the bodily aspect of degradation. The material lower bodily stratum becomes the point of focus in Djurberg’s *Cave*, when the female figure with the ripped-off limbs reveals her monstrously swollen vagina. This, together with her bloated belly and breast milk, links the abject imagery with maternity, therefore visualising aspects of Bakhtin’s description of the grotesque body as ‘always conceiving’.

In Rabelais’s novel the theme of death as renewal along with the synthesis of death and birth is a recurring image (Bakhtin 1984:51). In simple terms, when something dies it returns to the earth, thereby contributing to the matter from which new life can

be born. Even though this notion of regeneration that follows absolute degeneration is understood in the light of medieval grotesque realism, it is also a notion that can be read in the symbolic implication of contemporary artworks. 'Death as renewal' is a theme that can be traced in *Golgotha*. There is an excess of death signalled by the 'skullettos' and by the site where he ended his journey through the streets of New York City, Ground Zero. I am aware that this is sweeping statement to make, but this excess can possibly have a regenerating effect – mainly because the excess of Cohen's gestures have an uncannily liberating effect. Bakhtin talks about the 'deeply ambivalent' nature of grotesque imagery, because it is intimately related to the cycle of 'life-death-birth' (1984:149). One can pose the question whether Cohen's walking on skulls through Wall Street, reminding us of our capitalist existence, and ending at Ground Zero can be read as an allegory for the Western circle of life? If *Golgotha* is read this way, it reminds us that our lives are dominated by the striving for money and the inevitability of death.

Instead of making a moralising judgement about the state of Western capitalist lives, the work rather articulates a sense of 'death as renewal' in the degrading gestures in *Golgotha*. The metaphysical implication of Cohen's performance alludes to a saturation point – the excess of death subtly signalled by Cohen's gestures reaches a saturation point when he performs his mourning dance with the 'skullettos' on the platform at Ground Zero. Cohen states that *Golgotha* is a work that deals with issues of "how to stay human" (Cohen quoted in Powell 2010:11). The 'skullettos' can therefore be read as a symbol for absolute degeneration that calls for a questioning of what it means to be human in a world driven by capital gain.

The primary point to accentuate is that the body represented in the tradition of grotesque realism is not an "autonomous, self-sufficient object" – it is instead "irrevocably opposed to the 'completed atomized being' of bourgeois culture" (Gardiner 1999:69). Grotesque imagery unequivocally opposes the possibility of competition and finality. "The crux of the grotesque aesthetic," writes Gardiner, "lies in its portrayal of transformation and temporal change, of the contradictory yet interconnected processes of death and birth, ending and becoming" (1999:69). This 'unfinished becoming' that characterises the grotesque body will be elaborated on in Chapter Four, entitled *The attraction-repulsion paradox in response to the depiction of excess*.

Both *Golgotha* and *Experimentet* capture the imagination of viewers because they represent images of fragmented human bodies. With *Golgotha* Cohen almost

glamorises decapitation by turning human skulls into stilettos. In *Experimentet*, specifically in the animation *Cave*, Djurberg visualises hysterical neurosis by means of animating a puppet that rips her own body apart while reclining on a Victorian coach reminiscent of psychoanalytical treatment. Jacques Lacan provides a psychoanalytical account of why the human imagination is enthralled by images of the fragmented body. His concept of the fragmented body, or *corps morcelé*, provides a possible means to understand why artists such as Cohen and Djurberg are employing images that imply the fragmentation of bodies to communicate particular psychological concerns.

Lacan's notion of the fragmented body is closely linked with his psychoanalytical theory of the mirror stage.¹⁴ In the mirror stage the infant sees his reflection in the mirror as a whole, or as a synthesis. By contrast he perceives his body, which lacks motor coordination at this stage, as fragmented and divided. This feeling of fragmentation provokes anxiety, which in turn fuels identification with the specular image by which the ego is formed. However, the expectation of a synthetic ego is henceforth constantly threatened by the memory of this sense of fragmentation, "which manifests itself in 'images of castration, emasculation, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, bursting open of the body' which haunt the human imagination" (Evans 1996:67). These images characteristically appear in the dreams and associations of the analysand at a particular phase in psychoanalytical treatment, namely "when the movement of the analysis encounters a certain level of aggressive disintegration in the individual" (Lacan 2007:622). This means that these images of a fragmented body, of "disjointed limbs...and growing wings" (Lacan 2007:622), appear at the moment when the aggressiveness of the analysand emerges in the negative transference. This moment is a significant sign that the treatment is progressing in the right direction – towards the disintegration of the rigid unity of the ego (Evans 1996:67).

For Lacan, the concept of the fragmented body refers not only to images of the physical body, but also to any sense of fragmentation and disunity: "He [the subject] is originally an inchoate collection of desires – there you have the true sense of the expression *fragmented body*" (Lacan quoted in Evans 1996:67). Such a sense of

¹⁴ Lacan's psychoanalytical theory postulates two main stages in the development of consciousness: the Imaginary and the Symbolic. The Symbolic concerns a subject's entry into, and formation by, the realm of language; while the Imaginary involves a pre-linguistic stage of consciousness centred on the visual recording of images, a phase which Lacan terms the 'mirror stage' (Harrison & Wood 2007:620).

disunity threatens the illusion of synthesis that makes up the ego. Lacan's notion of the fragmented body is also used to explain certain distinctive symptoms of hysteria. Hysterical paralysis can affect limbs, and when this is the case the limbs disregard the physiological structure of the nervous system, thereby reflecting the way the body is divided up by an 'imaginary anatomy' (Evans 1996:67). In this way the fragmented body is "revealed at the organic level, in the lines of fragilization that define the anatomy of phantasy, as exhibited in the schizoid as spasmodic symptoms of hysteria" (Lacan quoted in Evans 1996:67). A sense of fragmentation and disunity, together with a sense of hysteria, can be observed in Djurberg's depiction of the female figure in *Cave*. The woman reclining on the couch seems to be entering the moment of transference – in psychoanalytic terms the moment the rigid unity of the ego becomes disintegrated. At the moment of transference the aggressiveness of the analysand emerges most likely as hysterical outbursts, and in *Cave* this is clearly the case, as the woman's dreams and anxieties becomes visualised in her acts of hysterical self-mutilation.

In conclusion, this chapter identifies how representations of the grotesque body in both Cohen's *Golgotha* and Djurberg's *Experimentet* relate to Bakhtin's account of 'the boisterous, disruptive and libidinous' characteristics of the folk-festive culture of the early Renaissance. A particular emphasis is placed on the sensory and carnal features evident in *Rabelais and his World*, as this relates to the phenomenon of excess in context of this thesis. The tactile characteristic of grotesque realism is not only expressed by means of unbridled sexuality, but also on a metaphorical level in the sense that Bakhtin encourages the concept of a direct, intense and familiar contact with everything. It is also important to repeat the fact that Bakhtin sees the nature of the grotesque as positive, because it is associated with regenerating forces of the material lower bodily stratum. Bakhtin emphasises the 'deeply ambivalent' nature of grotesque imagery, because it is intimately related to the cycle of 'life-death-birth' (1984:149). The aim of analysing both *Golgotha* and *Experimentet* in the light of Bakhtin's writings and Lacan's psychoanalytic theory was to show how the degrading gestures in both these artworks can possibly be seen as positive – that is, positive in the sense that both works suggest a notion of rebirth and renewal, despite the overt references to death and destruction, as I have argued.

This chapter described Bakhtin's concepts of grotesque realism and degradation, and Lacan's psychoanalytic theory of the fragmented body in the light of Cohen's film *Golgotha* and Djurberg's animation *Cave*; the next chapter will investigate how the

spectacle centred on the body, specifically in Cohen's use of 'skullettos', can be read as a cultural critique of capitalism.

CHAPTER TWO

The body spectacle as a cultural critique of capitalism

This chapter analyses the ways in which representations of the body spectacle are employed in Cohen's film *Golgotha* as a means to critique capitalism and Western capitalist culture. The analysis is placed within the theoretical framework of specific writings on capitalism by two distinctive theorists: George Bataille and Fredric Jameson.

First of all, I need to clarify what I mean by the term 'body spectacle'. In general, the word spectacle¹⁵ evokes images of elaborate display and performance, or in the negative sense, images of violence and obscenity. While responses to a spectacle may vary from viewer to viewer, much of the spectacle's appeal, or repulsion, develops from its visual power and ability to hold the gaze of the spectator. More specifically, Guy Debord's understanding of the spectacle addresses complex issues of class and control that arise with the emergence of social phenomena such as mass consumerism (Kan 2011). In *Society of the Spectacle* (1967) Debord argues that the onslaught of commercialism produced a singular market consciousness, or what he called 'the society of the spectacle'. Spectacle, in Debord's sense of the term, amends Marx's theory of accumulation of production into an accumulation of spectacles in consumer society. Debord defines the spectacle as a charade: "In all its specific forms, as information or propaganda, as advertisement or direct entertainment consumption, the spectacle is the present model of socially dominant life" (Debord 1977:No.6). In the context of this thesis's focus on representations of excess in relation to the body, this chapter investigates spectacle centred on the body, specifically in Cohen's application of his body in the filming of *Golgotha*.

In the opening sequence of *Golgotha* Cohen's body is decorated with glittering symbols of wealth (Fig. 33) – a Baroque-style corset made up of wedding crowns,

¹⁵ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'spectacle' as "a specially prepared or arranged display of more or less public nature", and as "a person or thing exhibited to, or set before, the public gaze as an object either (a) of curiosity or contempt, or (b) of marvel or admiration." (1989, Sv. 'spectacle').

velvet and mirrors (perhaps also a symbol for vanity). This scene introduces Cohen's questioning of the accumulation of wealth that is critiqued more blatantly later on in the video. The later scenes, where stock exchange tickertape (Fig. 34) is juxtaposed with views of the shop *Evolution* (Fig. 35), are evidence of Cohen's questioning of Western capitalism. *Evolution* is the upmarket New York City shop where Cohen bought the skulls. Set in the Soho shopping district, it is a place where the rich can buy curious natural history collectables. It can be said that it is the fact that Cohen could buy the skulls in a public shop in a city that embodies key values of the West that is so abhorrent. In an interview Cohen¹⁶ admits that he was at first morally indignant when he found the human skulls for sale, but that over the period of making the work, his concern shifted towards the question of what it means to remain human in today's world. He bought and transformed the skulls as a way to provoke shock and disgust in viewers – similar to the initial reaction he had when he found the skulls for sale. Cohen's gesture of transforming skulls into shoes, and then staging various performances with them within the capitalist setting of New York City's Wall Street, Times Square and Ground Zero, can be read as a representation of excess positioned as a cultural critique of capitalism. For this reason it is relevant to analyse *Golgotha* in the light of Bataille's notion of expenditure, as I will explain.

In an analysis of representations of excess as a cultural critique of capitalism, I focus on Bataille's writings on the distinction between general and restricted economy in *The Accursed Share: Volume I* (written 1949 and translated 1991). The status of excess or expenditure is a pivotal point in this text, as Bataille was of the opinion that capital accumulation is a malevolent force that distorts our social relations. One of the fundamental themes of Bataille's work is the critique of the belief that we should save for the future instead of living in the instant. The study is centred on Bataille's argument that we should live in terms of what the present moment offers us, rather than seeking to postpone its consecration to a future good.

Bataille's conception of excess is first introduced in *The Notion of Expenditure* (1933) and later refined in *The Accursed Share*. In the first text on excess, he starts exploring the idea that it is within the nature of any living organism to produce more than it needs for its own survival. Consequently, economic activity is not determined by shortage, but rather by the need for distribution of the excess wealth produced. Bataille states that "the world is sick with riches" (quoted in Richardson 1998:78). He

¹⁶ Ivor Powell interviews Cohen in the publication *Steven Cohen: Life is Shot, Art is Long* (2010).

presents his 'notion of expenditure' as a social function. In the preface to *The Accursed Share* he explains that he wanted to avoid redoing the work of economists. He deliberately avoids analysing the complexities of a crisis of over-production, and rather focuses in general on the mystery of economic activity through "tracing the exhausting detours of exuberance through eating, death and sexual reproduction" (Bataille 1991:13). It is in these domains of human life – eating, death and sexual reproduction – that excess is often most noticeable in visual form. Representations of excess are visualised in the form of the spectacle in *Golgotha*. Cohen's film can be said to trace something of Bataille's 'exuberance' through the visual reference to death with Cohen's use of skulls and his dance at Ground Zero. A more in-depth analysis of *Golgotha* in relation to Bataille's notion of expenditure will follow later in this chapter, but first I need to clarify what Bataille meant in his writings on excess and expenditure.

In Bataille's critique of accumulation he contrasts his concept of the 'general economy' with what he classified as traditional economics, which he calls the 'restricted economy' (Richardson 1994:67). Bataille regarded society as a social whole, believing that economics responds to all the elements within the social body. Accordingly, a clear conception of the general economy must consider economic factors in their totality; taking into account not only the financial structure of society, but also the psychological and sociological factors that are integrated within it (Richardson 1994:67). Classical, or traditional, economics – what he calls the 'restricted economy' – is based on the assumption that the need to protect scarce resources is fundamental to human society. Bataille sees this assumption as problematic, however, and highlights the importance of useless or gratuitous consumption and the fact that in some earlier societies (that is, societies prior to capitalism) it was the need for consumption that was considered primary, not that for accumulation (Bataille 1991:49).¹⁷ Bataille differentiates between two separate elements within the process of consumption. He identifies, on the one hand, the reducible part that is represented by the minimum required for the conservation of life, and on the other, "the wealth that is needed to be created precisely for unproductive expenditure" (Richardson 1994:71). In contrast to this, the restricted

¹⁷ Bataille explains how the ancient Aztec communities sacrificed human beings as offerings to the sun to convey their gratitude to this primary source of life. Therefore they placed an extreme value on consumption (Bataille 1991:49).

economy only represents the 'reducible part' of the process of consumption and therefore it can be said to undermine human possibilities.

From Bataille's perspective, in classical or traditional economics the extent to which people play and rest is negatively related to the need for work (Richardson 1994:72). What this economic calculation essentially means is that people should rest just enough to make them fit enough to work as hard as they can and produce as much as possible. As a result the need for leisure, in particular laziness in itself, is seen as a curse¹⁸, as it is perceived to exhaust productive forces and undercut the 'society of accumulation' (also called the society of restricted economy) that capitalism essentially is. Bataille, however, disputes these characteristics of classical economics and rather insists that leisure, and the expenditure that it requires, is part of the core of the effective economy. In Bataille's view any labour that only satisfies the need for accumulation is a perversion of genuine human needs. "Capitalist society, which explicitly bases an economy on scarcity, is thus a perverse society, devoted not to the satisfaction of its own needs, but to the benefit of a particular part of society that controls the productive process" (Richardson 1994:72). Humankind's "inner sensibility" (Richardson 1994:72) is disturbed as the economic needs are displaced from expenditure to accumulation. The consequence of this is that people become overwhelmed by a voluntary "enslavement to the world of things" (Richardson 1994:72). "The multitude has surrendered to the somnolence of production, living a mechanical existence – half ludicrous, half revolting – of things" (Bataille 1991:134). Thus Bataille sees in capitalist economic principles a progressive dehumanisation of communal relationships. "Capitalism in a sense", he writes, "is an unreserved surrender to things, heedless of the consequences and seeing nothing beyond them" (Bataille 1991:136).

It can be said that Cohen's performance in New York City is a revolt against capitalism in a way similar to that suggested by Bataille in *The Accursed Share*. Cohen's critique of capitalism, albeit a public one with his performance in New York City, remains highly personal. Prior to the making of *Golgotha* Cohen lost his brother through suicide. Cohen's various private dances with the 'skullettos' throughout the film radiate a sense of grief. By expressing his private grief in the public domain of the city, the artist takes the psychological and sociological factors of a public capitalist setting such as New York City into account. This is not only clear when the

¹⁸ This is particularly the case with a Calvinist view of economy (Bataille 1991:131).

artist ends his journey at Ground Zero, a site loaded with collective public and private grief and anger, but also with the very personal scenes edited in-between the footage of his performance in the streets of New York City. One particular scene shows the artist, dressed in the baroque style corset and the 'skullettos', alone in a white studio, performing a slow dance to the song *Hope There is Someone* by Anthony and the Johnsons. It is a poignant song about death, the lyrics including: "Hope there is someone, who'll take care of me, when I die, will I go".¹⁹ *Golgotha* not only connects death and capitalism in the walking with the 'skullettos' through Wall Street and Times Square, but also in the soundtrack that accompanies the film. The song *Rest in Peace* starts playing when Cohen arrives with the skullettos at Ground Zero. Sung by men and accompanied by trumpets, it almost seems to mock the situation implied by the connection of the skulls and Ground Zero. Sites of large-scale terrorist attacks, of which Ground Zero is the most prominent, remind us that the United States of America as a capitalist stronghold also makes it one of the main targets for capitalist critique and terrorist attack. With *Golgotha*, Cohen reminds us of the USA's, and therefore also the Western world's, capitalist power and its subsequent fragility.

With *Golgotha* Cohen furthermore explores the tension between personal identity and its experience in public life. Public and private collide in *Golgotha*, because footage of Cohen's staged spectacle in the city is combined with footage of the artist in solidarity and in grief. The footage of his live performance in New York City, for instance, is interrupted by a solitary sequence of 'upside-down' dancing with the 'skullettos'. Set to opera music, the viewer sees only Cohen's legs and feet in the air performing a mockingly playful dance with the Empire State building in the background (Figs. 36 & 37). The two points of the stilettos could be a playful albeit macabre reference to the absence of the twin towers of the destroyed World Trade Center. As mentioned, the dancing sequence is followed by footage of stock exchange ticker tape (Fig. 34) juxtaposed with views of the shop, *Evolution* (Fig. 35). In the editing of these scenes the public and the private, as well as references to capitalism and death, are combined in order to make specific statements on the state of Western capitalism. Also, it needs to be noted that Cohen wears the 'skullettos' and butterfly makeup throughout the entire film, but that the rest of his outfit changes in the public and private scenes. Cohen wears the baroque corset, with exposed legs and arms, in the private dancing scenes set in the studio (Fig. 33), while he wears

¹⁹ The song *Hope there is someone* by Anthony and the Johnsons can be listened to on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_Nq9fUX2WE

the stockbroker's suit when he performs in the public spaces in New York City (Fig. 20). Perhaps his wearing of the suit implies his attempt to fit in, or be accepted by, the capitalist Western world, but despite his efforts he remains an outcast. His wearing of the suit can also imply the artist mocking the conventions of capitalism, especially in the way that he degrades this traditional Western business attire by wearing it with the 'skullettos' (Fig. 38) – grotesque shoes that raise issue of death as well as of feminism or homosexuality. It can be suggested that with *Golgotha* Cohen questions the spectacle of Western capitalism through means of a personalised dealing with death within the larger context of Western capitalism. It seems as though Cohen is questioning the excess, or 'expenditure' as Bataille would say, of capitalist culture. By combining references of death with references to capitalist excess, Cohen is staging his own critique of accumulation. Therefore certain comparisons can be drawn between Cohen's questioning of what it means to be human in the consumerist West and Bataille's critique of accumulation.

In a discussion of Bataille's critique of accumulation, it is necessary to investigate his views on social life and the organisation of society. Of these views, Bataille's analysis of the necessity for luxury, on the one hand, and expenditure and sacrifice, on the other, is of particular relevance.

Firstly, Bataille's argument for the necessity of luxury needs to be explained. The point of departure for his argument in *The Accursed Share* is the fact that the sun, source of all energy on earth, "gives without ever receiving" (Bataille 1991:28), as it discharges an energy that can never be entirely be consumed for productive ends. "Solar energy is the source of life's exuberant development. The origin and essence of our wealth are given in the radiation of the sun, which dispenses energy – wealth – without any return" (Bataille 1991:28). This implies that there is always excess, because the sun's rays, which are the source of growth, are given without measure (Piel 1995:102). In other words, any restricted system receives more energy from the surrounding environment than it can profitably use up in simply sustaining its existence. The surplus of global energy cannot but partially be spent unproductively. Essentially all energy exchange, and therefore all economy, consists of the dynamics of expenditure – production and accumulation come only after this, as they constitutes an effort to confine and channel this expenditure of energy in the interest of utility. Thus, at the base of Bataille's thinking is the belief that life is essentially energy that strives to expend itself without fulfilling any specific purpose.

For Bataille this means that there is an accumulation of energy that can only be used up in dynamic exuberance – through the “luxurious squandering of energy” (Bataille 1991:33). Bataille presents the three luxuries of nature as eating, death and sexual reproduction (1991:33). In nature the least burdensome form of life is that of the green micro-organism, because it absorbs the sun’s energy through the process of photosynthesis. Generally vegetation is less burdensome than animal life. Animals develop more slowly and they turn the space occupied by vegetation into a field of slaughter. “Eating brings death, but in its accidental form,” states Bataille, “Of all conceivable luxuries, death, in its fatal and inexorable form, is undoubtedly the most costly” (1991:34). Bataille believes that we curse death only because we fear ourselves. “We lie to ourselves when we dream of escaping the movement of luxurious exuberance of which we are only the most intense form.” To state this in simpler terms: we loathe death, but we need it in order to survive. This necessity can be linked with our carnal needs: “...the luxury of death is regarded by us in the same way as that of sexuality, first as a negation of ourselves, then – in a sudden reversal – as the profound truth of that movement of which life is the manifestation” (Bataille 1991:34-35). Together with eating and death, sexual reproduction is one of the primary “luxurious detours” (Bataille 1991:35) that guarantees the intense consumption of energy.

It can be said that these ‘luxurious detours’ of eating, death and sexual reproduction are reflected in Cohen’s and Djurberg’s works. Death, with its paradoxical connotations of loathing and necessity, is particularly evident in *Golgotha*. Cohen demonstrates how humankind is the most suitable to consume the excess energy on the globe. Cohen signals a macabre cycle by combining the skulls (symbols of death) with references to capitalism. This implies that capitalist consumption is inevitably linked to death – no matter how much we accumulate or consume, death is inescapable, thereby rendering all kinds of capitalist accumulation futile. This is a simplified way of interpreting *Golgotha* in relation to Bataille’s writings, but it is something that can be read into Cohen’s performance. The entire film has a sombre tone and the combination of the clear reference to death together with various references to capitalism implies the futility of the capitalist accumulation. Cohen’s performance also implies that humankind is the beginning and the end-point of this futile cycle. In the history of life, according to Bataille, humans play an significant role in two respects: on the one hand, the development of human technology allows new possibilities for life, while on the other, “man is the most suited of all living beings” to consume the excess of energy vigorously and luxuriously (Bataille 1991:37). Jean

Piel, a French writer and friend and contemporary of Bataille, states in the context of Bataille's insistence on useless consumption that "man becomes a summit through squandering" (Piel 1995:102), thereby emphasising humankind's sovereignty in the living world. With Cohen applying his body to translate issues of morality, capitalism and personal identity into simple acts, he demonstrates something of Bataille's insistence that man 'becomes a summit through squandering'.

This brings the discussion to the second important aspect of Bataille's critique of accumulation, namely his explanation of expenditure and sacrifice. Bataille reserves the word 'expenditure' for unproductive forms, thereby excluding all the modes of consumption that serve production as the norm. "The human need expressed in luxury, mourning, war, cults, monuments, games, spectacles, arts and non-reproductive sexual activity remains as great as ever," states Michael Richardson, "but everything is done to divert such activity to the needs of utility rather than accept them for the pure effusion that they are" (Richardson 1994:76). It can be said that visual art is one of the ultimate forms of 'pure effusion', the experience of a work of art is equal to a momentary emancipation from specific ideas of emotions.

Bataille was fascinated with what was involved in sacrifice – where a generally willing victim was offered up, in other words 'given away', by the community as a whole in order to assure its own welfare. "The victim is surplus taken from the mass of useful wealth," writes Bataille. "Sacrifice is the antithesis of production, which is accomplished with a view to the future; it is consumption that is concerned only with the moment" (Bataille quoted in Richardson 1998:63-64). Hence for Bataille the problem of expenditure is inseparable from that of sacrifice. "Sacrifice was precisely the highest form of expenditure, which involves a consecration of pure loss" (Richardson 1998:61). With the institution of this pure loss, sacrifice challenges death, equilibrating life and death. Sacrifice also serves a transgressive function, as it stands for a collective crime that binds the community together and helped control its internal violence, situating it in harmony with cosmic forms. As a result, Bataille states that it is impossible to fully comprehend sacrifice only in terms of the individual victim.

There are elements of sacrifice in *Golgotha*. Firstly, in the act of transforming genuine human skulls into an art medium, it seems as though the remains of these anonymous individuals are offered up as sacrifices for art. Even the fact that human remains are for sale in a shop in New York speaks of a contemporary form of sacrifice – victims (willing or not, we do not know) whose bodies are used for the

benefit of the needs of others. Secondly, with Cohen ending his journey at Ground Zero – a site loaded with psychological, political and capitalist tension – he signifies death, and thereby also expenditure in its highest form. Bataille believed that sacrifice challenges death because it is an institution of ‘pure loss’. Cohen’s dance on the marble platform at Ground Zero (Fig. 22) becomes a lament for the victims of the crimes of the capitalist West. The two skulls come to represent the almost 3 000 lives lost in the 9/11 terrorist attacks. With grotesque reminders of the inequalities of human existence on his feet, he mourns the atrocities committed against humanity in general.

The use of human skulls in *Golgotha* reminds one of the tradition of *vanitas* painting.²⁰ *Vanitas* is Latin for ‘emptiness’ and loosely translated it refers to the meaninglessness of material life and the transient nature of vanity. It is relevant to compare *Golgotha* to other artworks that also incorporate the symbol of the human skull to express a critique, or celebration, of capital accumulation. A classic example of 16th century *vanitas* painting is Holbein’s painting of *The Ambassadors* (1533) (Fig. 39). Firstly, in the foreground of the painting there is a strange, slanting, oval form that reveals itself as a skull when viewed from an angle. (Fig. 40). It can be read as a *memento mori*: the medieval idea of representing a skull as a continual reminder of the presence of death. This motif of the *memento mori* overlaps with the intention of *vanitas* painting, as paintings in this genre are intended as a reminder of the transience of life, the emptiness of pleasure and the inevitability of death. Secondly, the way that painting is executed alludes to tremendous wealth. All the objects and textures in the picture are painted with great skill to create the illusion that the viewer is looking at real objects. Even though the two ambassadors have a definite presence, it is the objects and materials that surround them that dominate the painting. John Berger states in *Ways of Seeing* (1972) that from the 16th century onwards, oil painting began to celebrate a “new kind of wealth - which was dynamic and which found its only sanction in the supreme buying power of money” (Berger 1972:90). Before this, works of art also celebrated wealth, but wealth was then a symbol of fixed social and divine order. For this reason artworks such as Holbein’s *The Ambassadors* were the first to demonstrate the attractiveness of what money could buy.

²⁰ *Vanitas* is a symbolic still-life painting genre that originated in Northern Europe in Flanders and the Netherlands in the 16th and 17th centuries (Vlieghe 1998:9).

Holbein's painting is famous for the highly distorted skull in the foreground of the picture. Berger insists that if the skull in *The Ambassadors* had been painted like the rest of the objects in the picture, its metaphysical²¹ significance would have disappeared; "it would have become an object like everything else, a mere part of a mere skeleton of a man who happened to be dead" (Berger 1972:91).

This reference to the *vanitas* tradition relates to representations of excess. Historical paintings such as Holbein's *The Ambassadors* combine *memento mori* references together with materialist objects to speak of the dangers of the excess inherent in material culture. In a similar way contemporary paintings such as Penny Siopis's *Melancholia* (Fig. 7) (as mentioned in the introduction to this thesis) also depicts desirable objects that can be accumulated through wealth. Siopis subverts this desire for wealth not through a *memento mori* reference with the depiction of skulls, but by means of the representation of excessive amounts of rotting food. Cohen makes a direct reference to the tradition of *vanitas* with his use of skulls as shoes. But *Golgotha* also makes other, less obvious, allusions to the transient nature of material life through means of representations of excess. The scenes in *Golgotha* where Cohen is dressed in the corset, crowns and mirrors show close-ups of the artist's body, thereby drawing attention to his aging body. *Golgotha* also signals death when Cohen ends his pilgrimage through New York City at Ground Zero, the site of the bombed World Trade Centre. Both the presence of the artist's mature body and the setting of Ground Zero reference the theme of the inescapability of death in *Golgotha*.

A contemporary artwork that stands in contrasts to *Golgotha* in relation to capitalist accumulation is Damien Hirst's infamous sculpture: *For the Love of God* (2007) (Fig. 41). Consisting of a platinum cast of a human skull encrusted with 8 600 diamonds, it communicates an entirely different kind of capitalist excess than *Golgotha*. While Cohen's film mourns capitalist excess as a travesty, *For the Love of God* might be embracing and even celebrating it. There are other instances of artworks in the history of art that seem to celebrate excess in terms of capitalism and death. Consider Andy Warhol's series of prints entitled *Skulls* (1976) (Fig. 42). These silkscreen prints consist of depictions of human skulls printed in different colours with diamond dust in

²¹ The metaphysical refers to the study of that which lies beyond or outside of the physical realm. It strives to know and describe the world in its totality, including everything that is not immediately available to sight. It is therefore inevitably speculative because it deals with unknowable things such as causality, existence and possibility (Buchanan 2010:318).

the pigment. These two works are other examples of contemporary uses of the skull motif in relation to the theme of capitalism and consumer society.

At this point the discussion of the body spectacle as a cultural critique of capitalism turns to a more contemporary theory on capitalism and representations of the body. Fredric Jameson's book *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Capitalism* (1984, 1991) investigates the effects that late capitalism has on cultural production. Jameson's analysis of capitalism is grounded in a specifically 1980s understanding of postmodernism, and his perspective on global capitalism is historically and culturally specific. In his critique of capitalism he introduces the concept of the 'waning of affect' as a feature of the new depthlessness in art attributed to the cultural transformation known as postmodernism (Buchanan 2010:485-6). It can be said that representations of excess in relation to the body in contemporary visual art and culture lead to a 'waning of affect'²². It is relevant to investigate Jameson's notion of the 'waning of affect' in view of an analysis of Cohen's performance of walking with the 'skullettos' in the streets of New York. I offer two propositions with regards to Jameson's theory: on the one hand, Cohen's performance with the skulls affects viewers emotionally, while on the other, his performance reflects or emphasises the 'depthlessness' of contemporary visual culture as Jameson explains it.

For Jameson the 1960s witnessed the emergence of a new character type in both fiction and reality (the emergence of popular celebrity artists), "which because of its complexity could no longer be thought of in terms of such categories as the ego, or indeed various such pathologies of the ego enumerated by Freud such as anxiety and hysteria" (Buchanan 2010:485). Jameson (1991:10) illustrates his point by comparing Vincent van Gogh's *A Pair of Boots* (1887) (Fig. 43) with Andy Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes* (1980) (Fig. 44). He argues that is possible to imagine the situation that succeeded the former picture, because it conjures up an image of a tired poor farmer flinging his boots into a corner after a hard day's work in the field, but the same cannot be said of the latter, which offers only a arbitrary collection of dead objects. This is why Jameson argues that the artworks' impact on us needs to be thought in terms of intensity rather than affect, because it is impossible to

²² 'Affect' refers to that which the body and the mind suffers in the classic philosophical sense. It is something that we experience passively rather than actively – in other words when we are moved emotionally. One may be affected by internal stimulus, such as the imagination or the conscious; or external stimulus, such as physical, sensorial or cognitive stimuli (Buchanan 2010:485-6).

reconstruct the individual life-world which could serve as its point of reference, or “our anchor in the real” (Buchanan 2010:486).

Jameson identifies theories on the ‘new’ type of society that emerged together with theories on the postmodern namely ‘post-industrial society’, or its synonyms: consumer society, media society, information society or electronic/high-tech society (Jameson 1991:3). These theories have the apparent ideological mission of demonstrating that new social formations no longer obey the laws of classical capitalism, that is, the dominance of industrial production and the omnipresence of class struggle (Jameson 1991:3).

George Bataille believed excess to be a product of capitalist society’s break from the sacrificial rituals of the festival culture of pre-capitalist societies. But the question is how representations of excess has evolved in present-day postmodern culture. Today it is the over-abundance and easy accessibility of cultural products and information that dominate our cultural lives. “We are submerged in its henceforth filled and suffused volumes to the point where our now postmodern bodies are bereft of special coordinates and practically (let alone theoretically) incapable of distanciation” (Jameson 1991:48). These views support the idea that representations of excess can be defined as an aspect of the contemporary postmodern post-industrial condition.

With continued exposure to images than can be considered to be representations of excess, it can be argued that current postmodern culture’s offensive features “no longer scandalize anyone and are not only received with the greatest complacency but have themselves become institutionalized and are at one with the official or public culture of Western society” (Jameson 1984:4). Jameson identifies three constitutive features of this public culture in his exposition of the postmodern: a “new depthlessness”, which persists in the culture of the image or the simulacrum,²³ a subsequent “weakening of historicity”; and an entirely new type of “emotional ground tone”, or what he calls “intensities” (1991:6). Cohen’s *Golgotha* could perhaps be read as a work that challenges Jameson’s assertion that postmodern culture is ‘depthless’. On the contrary, an artwork such as *Golgotha* functions as a subtle

²³ Baudrillard tends to use the terms ‘simulation’ and ‘simulacrum’ interchangeably. For Baudrillard, the simulacrum is essentially a copy of a copy, meaning that it is a copy of something that is in itself not an original. He explains in *Simulacra and Simulation* (written 1981, translated 1994) that in postmodern circumstances the usual order of things has been reversed: the copy no longer follows the original, it now precedes it (Buchanan 2010:434-5).

reminder of the depth and complexity of human materiality (and it is less emotionally manipulative than a feature length film or a television drama series).

In his discussion on the 'new depthlessness' of postmodern culture, Jameson suggests that the waning of affect is, possibly, best approached by way of the human figure. In this regards I agree with Jameson. The fact that Cohen fashions the skulls into functional shoes makes a more powerful statement than if the skulls functioned only as objects in themselves. This means that if Cohen did not attach the skulls to his own body, the affect for the viewer might not have been as intense. Jameson proposes that the very concept of expression presupposes some separation within the subject, "and along with that a whole metaphysics of the inside outside, of the wordless pain within the monad and the moment in which, often cathartically, that 'emotion' is then projected out and externalised, as gesture or cry, as desperate communication and the outward dramatization of inward feeling" (1991:12). But the 'waning of affect' does not suggest that all emotion and feeling (or all subjectivity) has vanished, but that the formerly autonomous centred subject²⁴ has now been fragmented and overthrown, resulting in a shift in the emotional ground tone.

Jameson (1991:39) uses a comparative analysis of the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles to provide an allegory of what life is like in the postmodern world. All the physical elements of the public space of this hotel are out of proportion with the human subject. The person walking through the hotel is enveloped in a structure that never reveals its design. The person moves "from one context, perspective or dimension to another, more or less haphazardly" (Mansfield 2000:164). For Jameson the subject lost in the Bonaventure is an allegory of the postmodern subject (1991:39). As a result, the postmodern subject's interior life becomes equally disorientated. But this is not only evident in the postmodern architecture we inhabit, but also in the class and economic systems that direct our work and the national culture that supposedly defines us (Mansfield 2000:164). As a result, the postmodern subject's interior life becomes equally disorientated.

²⁴ A 'free autonomous being' refers to a subject: a generic term to appoint what used to be termed the individual or the self. But both Marxism and psychoanalysis have shown that the idea of an autonomous individual who thinks and acts wholly according to his or her own reason is improbable. On the one hand, psychoanalysis shows that the implication of the unconscious is that no agent is fully conscious of all his or her acts, while on the other hand, Marxism shows that no agent is capable of determining the course of history. The key implication of this is that the subject is the product of the conjunction of history and the unconscious, and not a naturally occurring entity (Buchanan 2010:456).

The way the cinematography shows Cohen's body in certain scenes in *Golgotha* reminds one of Jameson's analogy of how the subject is disorientated in the postmodern world. A specific camera shot in Times Square shows the artist standing in the distance. His body is dwarfed against enormous billboards, and he seems lost and disorientated in this scene (Fig. 45). In fact, throughout his entire pilgrimage through the city he seems out of place. The sense of displacement is especially discernable when he travels through Times Square. This scene reflects the disorientation that goes hand in hand with the 'depthlessness' of postmodern culture, or the waning of affect, as theorised by Jameson.

Jameson asserts that we no longer feel as intensely as we once did – and it is this phenomenon of the dissipation of emotion that he calls the 'waning of affect'. With regards to the material, or object, world (which forms part of the realm of visual art, which is the object of this study), postmodernism can be said to be a culture of the image and simulacrum, thereby rendering it essentially depthless. Drawing from Jameson, Sean Homer talks about "schizophrenic intensities" (1998:105), as this term best describes the psychic experiences of the displaced and fragmented postmodern subject. For Cohen, the sense of displacement perhaps also reflects the Diaspora of the Jews. Cohen's Jewish identity is important to him and he often makes viewers aware of this in his other works. Also, the references to capitalist accumulation are perhaps delivering a commentary on the stereotypical notion of Jews being money-makers.

This critique of the 'depthlessness' of material culture can be linked with Bataille's critique of accumulation. In the context of an analysis of *Golgotha*, it is important to reiterate Bataille's loathing of the focus on capital accumulation in Western civilisation, and the fact that with the onslaught of capitalism, people were encouraged to save for the future rather than living optimally in the present. As mentioned, Bataille's aim is to prove that it is not scarcity that governs our condition, but that excessive reproduction is the primary problem, as it is in the nature of the world and human beings to produce a surplus. Therefore Bataille asserts that the real problem facing capitalist society is to learn how to spend the surplus that we naturally produce.

With his performance in *Golgotha* Cohen utilises his art practice, in part, to deliver a critique of capitalist culture. To a certain extent Cohen's performance can be seen as an enactment of the 'pure effusion' Bataille talks about, as he highlights the excess of capitalist culture through the means of aesthetic representation. His staging of the

'body spectacle' in the streets of New York City recalls Bataille's insistence that the excess of capitalist culture should be spent lavishly and catastrophically, "with no other reason than a desire to do so" (Richardson 1998:79).

By staging the 'body spectacle' Cohen also reflects something of Jameson's notion of the 'waning of affect'. On the one hand, his journey through the capitalist setting of New York City's Wall Street and Times Square reminds viewers of the depthlessness of postmodern culture that Jameson notes. On the other hand, his performance of walking on the skulls can be said to overcome Jameson's concern about the 'waning of affect'. Cohen's gesture penetrates the surface value of consumer culture. It is possible that viewers might not necessarily be moved by his 'skulletto' journey through New York City, but his arrival at Ground Zero certainly strikes an emotional chord that lies far beyond the 'depthlessness' of postmodern culture that Jameson is so concerned about.

Having analysed Cohen's performance of the 'body spectacle' in *Golgotha* as a cultural critique of capitalism, with reference to Bataille's notion of expenditure and Jameson's 'waning of affect', the next chapter will investigate representations of excess centred on the female body, with a specific focus on Djurberg's installation *Experimentet*.

CHAPTER THREE

Excess and mimesis in representations of the female body

In this chapter I engage in a discussion of excess in relation to the female body, with specific reference to Djurberg's *Experimentet*. The grotesque or mutilated female body is a recurring theme in Djurberg's animations. In this chapter I focus only on Djurberg's three animations produced for the installation *Experimentet*, entitled *Greed*, *Forest* and *Cave*. The three animations depict the imposition of cultural norms upon the bodies and psychologies of women. The norms of patriarchy are, for instance, portrayed in a negative way in each of Djurberg's animations. This chapter adopts a psychoanalytical approach by combining an analysis of *Experimentet* with an investigation of the feminist theorist Luce Irigaray's concept of the role of excess in mimesis, as explained in *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1985). In this text she explains how the symbolic representation of the female body is mimicked to excess so as to expose the structures inherent in patriarchal and phallogentric power relations.

Firstly, a more colourful and detailed description of the installation *Experimentet* is required in order to understand Djurberg's intention with the artwork. One of the most distinct features of stop-frame animation is the erratic, or jerky, nature of the movements of the puppets. The very nature of animation relies on several repetitions of the same images, but with slightly changing movements each time. This feature of stop-frame animation, combined with Djurberg's expressive hand marks and the painterly quality of her handling of the clay, makes for a unique experience of the medium of animation. Djurberg states that she was first a painter before she began experimenting with hand-made animation (Kushner 2007:307). She seems to translate the features of painting, such as expressive brushwork and the use of vivid colour, into the crudely built sets and the clay puppets – bringing her characters to life with an eerie energy that is far removed from the naïveté of a medium that is usually associated with children's television shows. The medium of claymation makes the films seem innocuous at first glance, but the viewer soon becomes aware of a dark and unsettling undertone. The arrangement of the installation space also contributes to the feeling of malaise that Djurberg creates with her films. The fairly large room in which *Experimentet* is installed is enveloped in darkness, and an

imposing feeling of claustrophobia is created with the abundance of plant sculptures that are fantastical in nature and size. The soundtrack heard within the installation seems as though it could have been recorded in an alchemist's lab with unfamiliar clinking, bubbling and shrieking sounds. A rhythmic beating of bass drums can be heard throughout, thereby also adding to the atmosphere of disquiet. But the foremost factor that makes the viewing of *Experimentet* an uncomfortable, albeit fascinating, experience is the transgressive acts of sexualised violence performed by her idiosyncratic clay puppets, mostly on the bodies of female puppets with overstated female features.

"Djurberg's short Claymation films are often reminiscent, in their schematic character, of archetypal scenes from Freud's theories of sexuality – except that Djurberg's narratives seem bluntly literal, as if taking place in a realm where repression has burned off completely" (Kushner 2007:306). There are no limits in her intricate clay world, where characters engage in acts of sexual violence, body mutation and Oedipal rage. The narratives of each of the films in *Experimentet* allow for layered psychoanalytic readings.

The animation *Greed* shows three Catholic priests engaging in sexual acts with naked young girls (Fig. 46), thereby implying molestation. The priests' faces are grotesquely depicted with exaggerated noses, pale beady eyes and large gaping mouths, and each has unsightly long knobby fingers embellished with rings (Fig. 47). A particular scene shows one of the victimised girls frantically scrambling on her knees from under one priest's robe to the next (Fig. 48). Close-ups in between her captivation under the robes show an anxious expression on her youthful face (with large eyes, pink cheeks and full lips). At her attempt to escape the clutches of the priests she is violently snatched back under one of their robes. Another scene shows the priests detachedly observing the group of nude girls (Fig. 49) as they erotically clamber over each other's bodies, melting together and then clawing one another apart until only tattered bits of flesh and skeletons remain. The room in which the priests are watching the frightened performance has a yellow glow, but darkness creeps in from the corners. In a particular scene the camera pans over to a girl crawling away from the priests to clutch the feet of another victim – a standing naked girl with a pretty face and a dejected expression. The two girls reluctantly start dancing, embracing, kissing and touching each other in ways that evoke soft-core pornography. At one point one of the girls starts peeling off the flesh of the other (Fig. 50). Starting with the breasts, the girl performing the acts of violence sits on her knees and continues the ripping act down over the buttocks and the legs. The

stripped puppet then removes the flesh from her own arms as though she is taking off a jacket. At this point the two embrace again and the camera pans over to another scene showing two unsightly and heavy-set male characters with large swollen faces digging what seems to be a grave.

Throughout *Greed* the priests perform Catholic rituals, but these rituals are subverted not only by the presence of the victimised girls, but also with gestures that imply religious profanity, such as when one of the priests licks his hand whilst swinging a thurible (a metal censer suspended from chains in which incense is burned during worship services²⁵), and when a priest is shown riding a donkey (Fig. 51). The film focuses on the topical debate about violation of the young in the Catholic Church and exposes structures of patriarchal power and human decadence. As the film that also delivers the most biting satire on politics, it is set against the backdrop of Italian cultural politics of recent years.²⁶

Djurberg addresses the violations in the Catholic Church and, in doing so, exposes compromising patriarchal power structures. The actions performed by the puppets can be said to represent games of power play. The way that the priests impose their power on the young girls can be read as an allegory of the omnipresence of patriarchal power over women in Western society. There are many theoretical frameworks, particularly by feminists writers, in terms of which the structure of these power relations can be analysed, but in the context of this chapter's investigation of representations of excess in relation to the female body, I focus only on Irigaray's concept of mimesis in her philosophy of sexual difference. Irigaray's mimetic practice is determined by excess centred on the female body – meaning that Irigaray mimics the symbolic representation of the female body to excess so as to expose the structures of patriarchal power. It must be noted that I use both the terms 'patriarchal' and 'phallogentric'.²⁷ Issues surrounding patriarchal power relations are clearly communicated through Djurberg's animations, in particular *Greed*. This, in turn,

²⁵ The smoke rising from the thurible is symbolic of the prayers of the faithful rising to heaven. This symbolism is seen in Psalm 144 (140), verse 2: "Let my prayer be directed as incense in thy sight: the lifting up of my hands, as evening sacrifice" (Wikipedia 2011. Sv. 'Religious use of incense').

²⁶ This film was made before the recent series of exposures of clergy in the Catholic Church in Sweden, Germany, Italy, Ireland and other countries.

²⁷ Phallogentricism is any theory of sexuality which is focussed on or concerned with the phallus or penis as a symbol of male dominance (Buchanan 2010:365).

communicates phallogentric ideas, which can also be read in the other two animations, *Forest* and *Cave*.

In *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray: The politics of art by women* (2006) Hilary Robinson identifies two aspects of Irigaray's mimesis: non-productive and productive (2006:8). She discusses the first in relation to mimicry and mime, which maintain patriarchal structures as they are passed from one generation to another. Irigaray sees mimicry as "an interim strategy for dealing with the realm of discourse (where the speaking subject is positioned as masculine), in which the woman deliberately assumes the feminine style and posture assigned to her within this discourse in order to uncover the mechanisms by which it exploits her" (Irigaray 1985:220). 'Masquerade' is then identified as the practice of mimicry enforced by patriarchy, as it maintains women as "other than man's same" (Robinson 2006:8) within patriarchal structures. For Irigaray, masquerade is "an alienated or false version of femininity arising from the woman's awareness of the man's desire for her to be his other" (Irigaray 1985:220). Hysteria is discussed here also, "as the mark of a site of resistance to the masquerade which is femininity to the extreme of paralysis, muteness or even death" (Robinson 2006:8). Sites of resistance other than hysteria constitute what Robinson calls 'productive mimesis'. "In order to (re)gain the site of their subjectivity (which in phallogentric economy can only yet be hypothesised), women have to traverse the site of their exploitation knowingly and strategically." (Robinson 2006:9). At this point Irigaray's writings can be identified as both practice and analysis of productive mimesis.

Mimetic practices can often be observed in artworks²⁸. Robinson argues that in recent decades, mimetic practices have been used by women in a way that is overt and strategic, and that comments on those practices or upon the work being mimeticised in ways that have little to do with the usual mimetic processes of learning (Robinson 2006:18). Robinson identifies two differing, but also related, sets of mimetic practices in an investigation of art practices by women: "First, how the artist has learned to look, to select, to craft, to compose and to offer forward – how she has learned her visual language – and how she has sought to advance and make that language her own. Second, we are looking at her knowing interrogation and critique of practices that have gone before, her exposure of elements within

²⁸ The emphasis on 'originality' in artworks is relative, as one set of creative ideas mostly follows from previous sets. Also, artworks can often be categorised according to period and country, demonstrating how much artists owe to those around them (Robinson 2006:18).

those practices, her use of them to comment on them, her acknowledgement of them” (Robinson 2006:18). Artworks that fall under the second category are works that raise theoretical questions about visual culture in general, its gendered nature, the structures of looking instilled into them, and how these are passed through cultures and through generations (Robinson 2006:19). Robinson suggests that the methods that artists use – the nature of their mimetic practices – vary, ranging from mimicry and mime to masquerade and the excessive mimeticism of hysteria. She argues that such artworks question the production and reading of visual languages and their role in creating and communicating subjectivity (2006:19). One of the questions that Robinson raises in her investigation is: “What is the relation between sexual politics, the articulation of women’s subjectivities, and the production of visual art?” (2006:19). This question is relevant to an analysis of Djurberg’s films in *Experimentet* – particularly in helping to identify the strategies that Djurberg uses and understanding why she is employing them.

From an analysis of Djurberg’s three films in *Experimentet* it can be suggested that the artist is employing certain traits of Irigaray’s mimetic practice. The artist’s representations of the female form – with her idiosyncratic puppets portraying exaggerated ‘feminine’ features such as large breasts, buttocks, eyes and lips – can be read as symbolic representations of the female body mimicked to excess as to expose the structures inherent in patriarchal power relations and phallogocentric discourse.

Irigaray identifies two kinds of mimesis. Drawing from Plato, she identifies firstly “mimesis as production” (Irigaray 1985:131), which lies, for instance, in the realm of music; and then there is mimesis that involves imitation and reproduction. Robinson identifies the first form of mimesis as ‘productive mimesis’, and she explains that this involves a double movement. Irigaray touches upon this in her reference to the ‘realm of music’: just as musicians read the piece of music they play, they give their reading, their interpretation of it, instilled with particular nuances (Robinson 2006:26). In this way new meanings emerge from the process. Irigaray, however, does not expand this Platonic model of mimesis through theory, but she does expand on it through her practice. For Irigaray the practice and theory of mimesis are linked. The second form of mimesis, for which Robinson coins the terms ‘non-productive mimesis’ or ‘maintenance mimesis’ (2006:27) is interwoven with “verisimilitude, investigation of original truth, repetition, replication,” writes Robinson, “maintenance of what has gone before” (2006:27). It is the second kind of mimesis, non-productive mimesis, which can be read in Djurberg’s animations.

For Irigaray, social and cultural relations are maintained as normative within patriarchy through maintenance and policing of non-productive mimesis – thus, “a mimesis that perpetuates a state of status” (Robinson 2006:27). This is managed through generations (father-son), across class divides (master-slave, employer-worker) and in religion (god-man), copying previous structures in order to replicate ‘truth’ (Robinson 2006:27). Robinson (2006:27-28) explains that this structure is reflected in Irigaray’s writings with her repeated use of the term ‘*hom(m)o-sexualité*’ (mostly translated as ‘hom(m)o-sexuality’) – a word play referring to ‘man/same-sexuality’, or same-sex relationships in the broadest sense²⁹: “men, in recognising other men as the same as themselves, will seek to maintain power in a between-men culture,” states Robinson (2006:28), thus “a culture of patriarchal status and sameness”.³⁰

‘Maintenance mimesis’ or ‘non-productive mimesis’ places women in a peculiar position. Non-productive mimesis in patriarchal structures situates man as being ‘the same of the same’, while woman is situated elsewhere (Robinson 2006:28). Irigaray positions woman as “otherness of sameness” or “other of the same” [*autre du même*] (Irigaray quoted in Robinson 2006:28). Thus woman cannot be ‘the same as’; nor, in patriarchal culture, can she firmly identify with a genealogy of women. “Her function in patriarchy is that of the mirror,” explains Robinson (2006:28), “as a result of her ‘otherness’ reflecting back to man his ‘sameness’”. She has to adopt – to assimilate to – femininity.” Robinson explains how the “almost fatal” (2006:28) nature of this move is twofold: “firstly, it requires her adaptation and assimilation to a hom(m)o-sexual culture; and secondly, as the necessary corollary (because she is not ‘the same as’), it requires her to replicate a ‘femininity’ that is not of her making” (2006:28). It is because of this function that Robinson has dubbed it maintenance or non-productive mimesis: “It maintains the given cultural structure and while it is productive of an identity appropriate for the woman assimilated to patriarchal culture, it does not produce a horizon of possibilities where women can become women, attaining their full subjectivities” (Robinson 2006:28). Robinson suggests that the levels of

²⁹ Irigaray’s term ‘hom(m)o-sexuality’ should not be confused with homosexuality as a sexual relationship. Sexual desire for the same sex is distinct from the processes of identification involved in desire to be ‘the same as’ (Robinson 2006:28).

³⁰ The structures of maintenance mimesis, or non-productive mimesis, can be compared to the structures central to child development and the discovery of skills: the child needs to recognise another person as being of the same general type, desire to ‘be as’, and to assess the extent to which his or her actions are a successful imitation (Grosz 1995:90 in Robinson 2006:28).

repression required in this non-productive/maintenance mimesis are vast (2006:28). It is at this point, in reference to woman's relation to this assigned 'femininity', that Irigaray introduces the terms mimicry, masquerade and hysteria in distinction from each other and from mimesis. These terms will be outlined with reference to a more in-depth discussion of Djurberg's animations *Greed*, *Forest* and *Cave*.

Irigaray's use of the term 'mimicry' can be read in relation to Djurberg's animation *Greed*. Irigaray uses the term 'mimicry' at two key points in *This Sex which is not One*: "There is, in an initial phase, perhaps only one 'path', the one historically assigned to the feminine: that of mimicry [*le mimétisme*]. One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it. Whereas a direct feminine challenge to this condition means demanding to speak as a (masculine) 'subject', that is it means to postulate a relation to the intelligible that would maintain sexual indifference" (Irigaray 1985:76). This passage is reminiscent of childhood mimicry and the way that it exceeds the bounds of propriety in the face of authority. The use of words such as 'form of subordination', 'a direct feminine challenge', 'demanding', and 'to play' leads towards an understanding of productive mimesis (Robinson 2006:29). It can be suggested that the victimised girls in *Greed* are deliberately assuming the role of femininity when they embrace and dance for the viewing pleasure of the priests (Fig. 52). Even though it seems as though the girls are forced into the situation where they find themselves captivated under the priests' robes, they still perform the playful eroticised acts that are expected of them with each other. By dancing until their clay bodies merge together and in their willingness to tear into each other's clay flesh (Fig. 50), turning their subordination into affirmation in the patriarchal hierarchy.

Irigaray continues her explanation of mimicry as a path that is assigned to the female condition by further stating: "But the mimetic role itself is complex, for it presupposes that one can lend oneself to everything, if not everyone. That one can copy anything at all, anyone at all, can receive all impressions, *without appropriating them to oneself*, and *without adding any*. That is, can be nothing but a possibility that the philosopher may exploit for (self-)reflection. [...] If she ['the philosopher's wife/woman'] can play that role so well, if it does not kill her, quite, it is because she keeps something of reserve with respect to this function" (Irigaray 1985:151-152). In this paragraph the role of mimicry can appear more passive: 'the female condition is assigned', 'presupposes that one can lend oneself', 'be nothing but a possibility that the philosopher may exploit'. Robinson identifies this process as 'mime'. Mime differs from non-productive mimesis (being the same as, or of the same) in that the

femininity that woman mimes is “not of her own making”, and thus “even as she mimes, she is always elsewhere, with something in reserve” (Robinson 2006:30). It can thus be said that Irigaray identifies mimicry as perhaps the only option for woman within patriarchy, but it is one that is “double-edged” (Robinson 2006:30) – “it offers the opportunity for sites of resistance” (Robinson 2006:30). But these strategies have to be undertaken with caution, because on the other hand mimicry involves “the almost fatal repression of ‘becoming woman’” (Robinson 2006:30). This means that the implementation of the strategies of mimicry should always be considered, because they can easily have the opposite effect of their intention – by repressing the very ideas they seek to liberate.

A current use of the term ‘mimicry’ can be found in biology, where it means visual camouflage, or having the colouring of the environment (Robinson 2006:30). Camouflage refers to an individual’s assimilation into its environment, and this performs a number of functions. The foremost function of camouflage is protection. But camouflage is not only used by the prey for protection, but also by the predators as an aid in predation (Robinson 2006:30). Roger Callois (surrealist writer and friend of Lacan) recognised other, psychotic, features of camouflage in relation to the subject in space. Robinson explains: “In order to be confirmed in its identity, a subject or organism has to be secure in its distinction from the assimilation to the cultural environment that it occupies” (2006:30). Callois draws an analogy with this in the mimicry of insects, as their mimicry may sometimes produce the opposite of protection. Callois identifies one insect whose resemblance to the leaves it feeds upon makes it often prey to cannibalism. He suggests that mimicry in insects can be a surplus to its requirements: it is visual, while many predators rely upon smell; and some insects practise mimicry even though they are not vulnerable to predators (Callois 1984:24-25 in Robinson 2006:30). Following Elizabeth Grosz’s statement: “The mimicking insect lives its camouflaged existence as not quite itself, as another” (1995:190 in Robinson 2006:31), Robinson declares that “mimicry is an excess to strategies of survival, a product of a dislocation of identity” (2006:30). Is this perhaps also the role that the naked girls in *Greed* are performing? It can be suggested that if they were not assuming so-called ‘femininity’ – in other words, if they were not mimicking the symbolic representation of the female body – they might not have been subject to sexual victimisation.

Callois’s theory of camouflage resonates with Irigaray’s use of the term mimicry with a constituent aspect of mime. Robinson explains: “The subject compromises, represses or adapts its perspective on its identity in favour of an *apparent* (literally, in

its appearance, visible, perceivable) assimilation to its environment – in this case, assimilation to the virtual world of ‘femininity’ as erected by the structures of patriarchy” (2006:31). Here Robinson draws an analogy with the visual performance of the mime artist. The audience, for example, never sees the wall that the mime artist walks into, but through stylised actions of exaggerated gesture, the audience imagine the wall. The audience are fascinated because it is as *if* they see the wall. “What is demonstrated is indeed a captivation of the mime by his or her representations of and as space” (Robinson 2006:31). Also, in *Greed* viewers are made aware of the violence performed on the bodies of the girl-puppets, even though we never see any actual acts of brutality. It remains implied through the imposing gestures of the priests and the frightened expressions of the girls (Fig. 47). The ripping of the clay flesh of the puppets is disturbingly graphic, even with the absence of blood and guts (Fig. 50). Because of the fantasy element, the violence in Djurberg’s films is never explicit. On the contrary, it takes place in the viewers’ own imagination. The audience is convinced of the clay-puppet’s brutality in the same way that they are convinced by the mime’s actions. It is through mimicking femininity in excess – up to the point where the girls tear each other’s flesh apart – that violence on the bodies and psychologies of women is implied.

The use of terms such as ‘patriarchy’ makes the discussion of mimicry part of the realm of the political. Irigaray also considers related concerns in the realm of the psychoanalytical through her implementation of the concept ‘masquerade’. Djurberg’s puppets’ performance in the film *Forest* can be said to display aspects of Irigaray’s understanding of the term masquerade.

At the beginning of *Forest* a fully clothed woman is shown riding on the back of a clothed man as he climbs from one large forest tree to the next in an attempt to escape something that is threatening them (Fig. 53). The female puppet is represented in stereotypical feminine attire: a lace dress, jewellery and make-up; while the other puppet is an unattractive aging man with a bald head and a potbelly (Fig. 54). The woman is soon thrown off the back of the old man as it becomes apparent that the unknown thing chasing them is more menacing than it initially seemed. Later on the man and the woman violently and awkwardly clamber over each other in their haste to navigate their way through moving tree branches. Both puppets’ clothes are ripped off in their aggressive clambering over each other and through the trees, revealing the grotesquely shaped bodies idiosyncratic of Djurberg’s animated figures (Figs. 14 & 55). This crude revealing of the female and male bodies makes the animation highly eroticised. The woman’s figure is

represented as attractive, with large breasts, fleshy buttocks and blond hair. As a viewer one expects a rape scene, but it never happens. In their battle for survival the difference between the two sexes is assured, but their existence is mediated by a force greater than their battle with each other. The threatening ripping acts of the forest trees provoke the sexualisation of the two figures. This battle between the man and the woman, and their battle with the forest, can possibly be read as an allegory for general relationships between the two sexes.³¹

The battle between the sexes in *Forest* can be understood in the light of Irigaray's concept of masquerade. The way that the woman is portrayed as sexually attractive, and the manner in which is undressed denotes to the idea of the masquerade of femininity. Some of the other most prominent commentators on masquerade includes psychoanalytic theorist Jacques Lacan and Jacqueline Rose. Rose suggests that for Lacan "Sexuality belongs [...] in the realm of the masquerade" and "masquerade is the very definition of 'femininity' precisely because it is constructed with reference to a male sign" (Rose 1982:43 cited in Robinson 2006:32-33). Lacan includes masquerade into his structures of fetishism and castration, and particularly the distinction between 'being' and 'having' the phallus – with the former being the prerogative of women, and the latter, of men (Robinson 2006:33). For Lacan, the masquerade is a unified concept of 'femininity', behind which is nothing but lack (Robinson 2006:33).

Irigaray's understanding of masquerade, however, differs from Lacan's. For Irigaray, 'femininity' is constructed by men in both patriarchal and phallogentric structures "to mark the other of their same" (Robinson 2006:33). Femininity is neither an essential aspect of woman's identity, nor is it structured by women in reaction or opposition to patriarchy or phallogentricity. For Irigaray, the masquerade "permits woman to experience desire not in her own right but as the man's desire situates her" (Irigaray 1985:220). Irigaray thus links the masquerade to Freud's concept of femininity: "What do I mean by masquerade? In particular, what Freud calls 'femininity'. The belief, for example, that it is necessary to become a woman, a 'normal' one at that, whereas a man is a man from the outset. He has only to effect his being-a-man, whereas a

³¹ *Forest* could perhaps be a dramatic representation of a sexual relationship between a man and a woman, illustrating how this relationship is often complicated by external forces beyond the control of either of two people involved.

woman has to become a normal woman, that is, has to enter into the *masquerade of femininity*" (Irigaray 1985:133-134).³²

In Djurberg's work the theme of masquerade comes into play at the very beginning of *Forest*, where the two puppets are depicted in stereotypical male and female attire, and with typical male and female bodily features. The two puppets perform something of Irigaray's masquerade when they rip each other's clothes off. Even though the ripping of clothes is not followed by sexual acts, sexual interaction is implied in their clambering over each other's bodies. The man and the woman's aggressive battle with each other and with the forest speak of an unpleasant kind of masquerade of femininity. The presence of the aging man in *Forest* constitutes patriarchal structures, while the poking branches of the trees could be said to represent phallogentric structures. For Irigaray, both of these structures, of patriarchy and phallogentrism, construct femininity. From the outset the woman in *Forest* performs the 'masquerade of femininity' with her typical womanly attire, but she only becomes fully 'feminine' once her clothes are ripped off in the presence of the older man. Djurberg's depiction of the masquerade of femininity is, to a certain extent, degrading. The women her animated puppets portray are never completely 'normal' (in the generalised sense of the term). Their masquerade of femininity is deliberately distorted into representations in line with the characteristics of grotesque realism.

For Irigaray there is no essence of 'womanliness' (Robinson 2006:35). It is rather produced from something quite its opposite – the assigned 'femininity' erected by patriarchy and phallogentrism. "Woman has no choice but to respond to these structures by enacting the masquerade," explains Robinson. "A renunciation of her desire is involved; so too is the fact that she is already elsewhere – she is neither lacking, nor subject either to the 'eternal feminine'" (Robinson 2006:35). This may seem like a despondent situation, but the possibility for resistant strategies is in fact embedded within the structure – even if it may be masked by the masquerade itself. For Irigaray, the strategies for resistance can follow differing paths: either hysterical mimicry or productive mimesis.

For Irigaray woman's adaptation and adoption of 'femininity' is a mimetic process in which women masquerade that which they are required to be. Robinson suggests

³² With her commentary on Freud's theory of castration she notes: "...the fact of castration will leave woman with one option – the semblance, the masquerade of femininity, which will always already have been to 'act like' the value recognized by/for the male" (Irigaray 1985:49).

that if this is the case, then hysteria is a strategic redoubling of that mime, “taking it the nth degree in order to wrest back some control over destiny, identity and sexuality” (Robinson 2006:36). Irigaray’s conception of hysteria can thus be understood as a “calculated continuum” (Robinson 2006:36) of the masquerade of femininity.

Elements of Irigaray’s concept of hysteria in the mimicry of femininity can be read in *Cave*, the third animation included in *Experimentet*. As described in Chapter One, *Cave* shows a female puppet mutilating her own body as her schizophrenic limbs break off and attack her. Also as mentioned in Chapter One, the puppet is shown reclining on a Victorian coach reminiscent of psychoanalytical treatment. Here Djurberg seems to suggest a link between art-making and psychoanalysis. At the beginning of the film the puppet is shown pulling her own hair above her head in a way reminiscent of the way a puppeteer would pull the strings of a marionette. In this way the audience becomes aware of the protagonist’s desperate need to perform ‘womanliness’. In fact, this urge is so strong that the puppet’s personality splits into two in a schizophrenic kind of hysteria.

Generally, hysteria is a term that describes unmanageable emotional excesses. It designates pathological symptoms of either a physical or psychic nature for which no cause is evident (Buchanan 2010:239). Freud, following the French neurologist Jean Charcot, became interested in hysteria and in the course of the development of psychoanalysis he proposed that hysteria is the product of psychic conflict between thoughts generated in the unconscious and the censor shielding the conscious (Buchanan 2010:239). Hysteria, in the general use of the term, often involves fear centred onto a body part, or an imagined problem with that body part.³³ The female puppet in *Cave* clearly finds her female reproductive organs problematic, as shown in the way that her ripped-off limbs mutilate the vulva of her vagina and tears off her breast (Figs. 15 & 29). Until the middle of the nineteenth century hysteria was believed to be an exclusively ‘female malady’³⁴ (as it was commonly referred to in the Victorian era) (Buchanan 2010:239). With *Cave* Djurberg perhaps created a parody

³³ This imagined fear of a body part falls under Freud’s first type of hysteria, ‘conversion hysteria’, in which the unconscious versus conscious conflict is expressed in bodily symptoms (Buchanan 2010:239).

³⁴ The word is derived from the Greek word *hystera*, which means ‘uterus’ or ‘womb’, and it has its origin in the idea from ancient Egypt as well as classical Greece and Rome that the female reproductive organ is able to move throughout the body and that this movement is triggered by an unsatisfied longing for a child (Buchanan 2010:239).

of this dated belief that hysteria was a malady that affected females suffering from sexual dysfunction.

The phenomenon of hysteria is shown by Irigaray as an unavoidable part in the structuring of 'femininity'. "Mimicry, 'femininity' and hysteria are so closely related and intertwined as to be almost contagious. Where two are found, the third will not be too far distant" (Robinson 2006:27). Lynda Nead places a discussion on hysteria in the realms of the visual, the aesthetic of mimicry. Robinson (2006:37) explains how Nead writes about the absolute control required in our culture of the borders and the orifices of the female body and the representations of it. Nead describes this control as "an aesthetic that has structured the representation of the female body in western art since antiquity" (Nead 1992:5-6 cited in Robinson 2006:37).

Drawing from Jacques Derrida, among others, Nead shows how the female body including representations of it in Western culture "is defined as lacking containment and issuing filth and pollution from its faltering outlines and broken surface" and how art continually submits it to regulation and "repair" (Nead 1992:7 in Robinson 2006:37-38). (Incidentally, *Cave* is an artwork that does not 'submit' the orifices of the female body to 'repair', but rather seems to celebrate them by representing the discharge of breast milk. In this way Djurberg subverts the usual representations of the female form.) Nead also turns to the anorexic body to explain hysterical mimesis. The anorectic woman sees her body as an image that is subject to a set of conventions and judges it accordingly: "Here again the body is seen as image, according to a set of conventions, and woman acts both as judge and executioner. But rather than anorexia being seen as a distortion of physical needs, it can be posited instead as a confusion of psychic perceptions and, more precisely, as confusion of form and its boundaries. For the anorectic, there is always excess matter deposited over the surface, the form of the body. The goal is to get rid of that surplus and to reveal the essential, core self – to get back to the original boundaries (Nead 1992:10-11 cited in Robinson 2006:38).

This echoes Callois's observation on the mimicking of insects that causes the dislocation of the insect's visual identity. Robinson points out, however, that in the case of hysteria, the intention, desire and will of the hysterics are important. "Hysteria is the location of a 'reserve' of the masquerade of femininity: it exceeds the femininity that vouchsafes man his identity" (Robinson 2006:38). Irigaray sees a "revolutionary potential in hysteria" at this point, a potential that Grosz summarises as "a mode of defiance of patriarchy, not the site of its frustration. In this sense, the hysteric is a

proto-feminist, or at least an isolated individual who, if she had access to the experiences of other women, may locate the problem in cultural expectations of femininity rather than femininity itself. The hysteric's defiance through excess, through *overcompliance*, is a parody of the expected" (Grosz 1989:135 in Robinson 2006:38). This 'defiance through excess' can be seen in the puppet's sadistic self-mutilation in *Cave*. Through mimicking the female body to excess – so much so that the masquerade leads to hysterical mimicry and ultimately to destruction – the female puppet in *Cave* is a parody of that which is expected of 'femininity'.

Throughout her work Irigaray argues for the development of structures that will allow the reaffirming and integrity of female genealogies. Robinson suggest that at present the majority of options are either to mimic an assigned 'femininity', or to mimic men in phallocentrism, or the "Phallic Symbolic", which, she states, "are, of course, (two sides of) the same (coin)" (2006:41). Robinson suggests an outcome for to this dilemma: "we must pass through the resistant moment of hysteria and through productive mimesis" (2006:41). The one way to achieve this is through assuming the female role deliberately by means of mimicry (Irigaray 1985:76), while the other way is to follow the hysteric. Irigaray notes that "there is always, in hysteria, both a reserve power and a paralyzed power" (Irigaray 1985:138). Robinson suggests that as the hysteric mimics 'femininity', so too (Irigaray suggests) there is a possibility of tapping into this reserve cultural power through deliberate mimicry of the role assigned to women. Robinson warns, however, that this would be "a knife-edge strategy, with a danger of falling into the self-defeating paralysis of the hysteric" (Robinson 2006:41).

As a psychoanalyst, Irigaray's response to hysteria is to attempt to work through it, at least in part, in the realm of the aesthetic (Robinson 2006:39). "Hysteria must not be destroyed but allowed access to the imagination and to creativeness. For the hysteric access to such an identity is effected through a sexualised art, a coloured and sonorous art, an art whose libidinal resources blossom in duality and reconciliation, within one woman [...] and among women. Thanks to such an art, the hysteric should be able to regain her perception – her virginity, her gender – and keep hold of them" (Irigaray 1993:164).

While Irigaray recognises a revolutionary potential in hysteria, she does not wish to valorise the hysteric, or to maintain her condition, or to urge women to a state of hysteria (Robinson 2006:39). Her intention is rather to model the strategies used by the hysteric into a productive mimesis by means of identifying both mimicry and a

place of resistance within hysteria. In my opinion this is what Djurberg is doing through her creation of psychologically disturbing animated films. Fantasy is an effective, and perhaps congenial, way to illustrate the complexity of human behaviour in relation to female sexuality, making the medium of claymation the ideal instrument for Djurberg to give form to her unique interpretations of sexual difference and social injustices.

The artist's creation of each of the films in *Experimentet* can be read as a practice of mimesis as Irigaray sees it. *Greed* depicts mimicry in the way that the dominance of the priests over the naked girls maintains patriarchal structures; the battle between the man and the woman in *Forest* shows elements of masquerade in the sense that masquerade is the practice of mimicry enforced by patriarchy; and *Cave* visualises hysteria as the mark of a site of resistance to the masquerade of femininity when the female puppet rips her own body apart. The fact that Djurberg produced these films with the intention of visualising a kind of disruptive excess shifts the mimesis practised into the productive realm. According to Robinson, productive mimesis constitutes sites of resistance other than hysteria. "[I]n order to (re)gain the site of their subjectivity women have to traverse the site of their exploitation knowingly and strategically" (Robinson 2006:9). I propose that this is precisely what Djurberg has done with the production of the films in *Experimentet*.

Although each of these categories of mimesis – mimicry, masquerade and hysteria – is classified as non-productive mimesis or maintenance mimesis, they collectively constitute what Robinson would call productive mimesis because together, within the larger context of the installation *Experimentet*, they model the strategies used by the hysteric. By deliberately adopting the strategies of the hysteric, Djurberg affirms her genealogy as a woman distinct from patriarchal or phallogocentric structures.

Irigaray's categories of mimesis relate to the broader concept of representations of excess. Firstly, excess is represented in the way in which Djurberg portrays her puppets with overstated feminine features (which can be read as symbolic representations of the female body mimicked to excess). Secondly, in Djurberg's animations it is in the instances where the masquerade of femininity is taken further – to excess – that hysteria manifests. The abovementioned depictions of hysteria can therefore be read as representations of excess in relation to the body.

Having explained how the symbolic representation of the female body is mimicked to excess in order to expose the structures inherent in patriarchal and phallogocentric

power relations, the next chapter will investigate the experiences possibly evoked in viewers by representations of excess in relation to the body.

CHAPTER FOUR

The attraction-repulsion paradox in response to the depiction of excess

“Men are swayed by two simultaneous emotions: they are driven away by terror and drawn in by an awed fascination.” (Bataille 1986:68)

This chapter investigates the experiences elicited in spectators by depictions of excess in relation to the body. I suggest that spectators may experience paradoxical feelings of being simultaneously attracted and repulsed in viewing *Experimentet* and *Golgotha*. I argue, in reference to both Djurberg and Cohen’s artworks, that the representation of excess in relation to the body is characterised by the paradoxical dynamic of at once seducing and disgusting audiences. The aim of this chapter is thus to outline how the specific kinds of representations of excess evident in the two artworks evoke contradictory feelings within a viewer. In my argument I attempt to theorise this phenomenon with reference to specific texts by Bataille and Bakhtin.

The attraction-repulsion response is often elicited by depictions of bodies associated with aging, decay or death. Anca Cristofovici talks about the “paradoxical dynamic of attraction and repulsion that we [as viewers] inevitably associate with bodies marked by time or disease” (2009:4-5). Cristofovici explains that attraction and repulsion are “a pair of affects not unlike our ambivalent relationship to our own aging”³⁵ (2004:48). As indicated before, the fear of aging and the awareness of mortality are pronounced themes in *Golgotha*. This is made clear in the work with the audience’s attention drawn to Cohen’s aging body, and with the use of skulls as a *memento mori* reference (a reminder of the inevitability of death). Despite these overt references to death and decay, the viewer remains captivated and seduced by the intensely poetic nature of these images in Cohen’s film. The way his body is decorated, his ephemeral and delicate dances with the ‘skullettos’, and the settings in which his

³⁵ Cristofovici explains this with reference to a photographic work by Geneviève Cadieux, *Blue Fear* (1990), which shows the torso of an elderly man seen from the back with a superimposed image of his eyes (2009:4-5).

performance takes place allure viewers into watching the film intently. The way that the footage is filmed and edited, with careful attention to the juxtaposition of images and accompanying soundtrack, also contributes to the poetic and melancholic aesthetic of *Golgotha*. It can thus be suggested that the aesthetics of the film contribute to its morbidity (and vice versa), in the same way that the sublime, as Edmund Burke defines it,³⁶ simultaneously provokes terror and beauty.

References to death are also evident in Djurberg's animations in *Experimentet*, but these allusions to death are less overt, because the audience never sees any corpses or actual violence inflicted upon bodies, only suggestions of it by means of the clay puppets' actions. But the acts of brutality inflicted on the clay puppets' bodies are unmistakable. The way that the puppets continue to 'live' despite their bodies being torn apart (such as the self-mutilating woman in *Cave*, or the naked girls who rip each other's flesh in *Greed*) means that they can be described as a kind of 'zombie' (that is, a soulless corpse that is revived through means of supernatural powers). Djurberg's references to death, body mutilation and decay are, of course, playful. The humour in her animations compels viewers to look, but the acts of brutality repulse despite the fact that the violence is cleverly 'masked' by the innocence and the humour associated with clay animation.

Roland Barthes wrote about "the attraction of repulsion" (Barthes quoted in Nehamas 1989:31) evident in Bataille's diverse oeuvre of literary and theoretical work. As discussed in Chapter Two, *The Accursed Share* is considered one of Bataille's most influential theoretical works. But he is also recognised for his sophisticated pornographic novels, of which *Story of the Eye*³⁷ (1928) is the most famous. Kylie Rachel Message does a comparative analysis of George Bataille's attractive-repulsive literature and contemporary art in her essay: *Watching over the wounded*

³⁶ Burke states that the sublime is "productive of the strongest emotion that the mind is capable of feeling" (2001: <http://www.bartleby.com/24/2/107.html>). He explains: "Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible...is a source of the sublime" (2001: <http://www.bartleby.com/24/2/107.html>). Burke continues his explanation by stating that pain has a stronger impact than pleasure, and that that death is, in turn, in general more affecting than pain. The experience of pleasure is impossible ("simply terrible") when pain or the danger of death presses too nearly - "but at certain distances, and with certain modifications," suggests Burke, "they may be, and they are, delightful" (2001: <http://www.bartleby.com/24/2/107.html>).

³⁷ In 1927 Bataille published *Histoire de l'oeil* (*Story of the Eye*) under the pseudonym Lord Auch. The book was so transgressively pornographic that it remained unpublished under 'Lord Auch' during Bataille's lifetime. It was republished in 1967, after his death, and then became a cult classic, electing commentaries by Roland Barthes and Michael Foucault (among others) (Jay 1994:220).

eyes of George Bataille and Andres Serrano (2004). By comparing Serrano's *Morgue* series of photographs of corpses (produced in 1992) (Fig. 56) with Bataille's pornographic novel *Story of the Eye* (1928) (which narrates the bizarre sexual perversions of a pair of teenage lovers), Message identifies an attraction-repulsion mechanism of the corpse that "seduces the subject, blinds the eye, and produces signage in reference only to death" (Klaver 2004:xviii). Message quotes Serrano as saying that "my work does more than just shock, it also pleases" (Serrano quoted in Message 2004:126), by way of which she identifies "the attraction-repulsion paradox that seduces the spectatorial eye within the gaze of a corpse" (2004:126).

Cohen's 'skullettos' and Djurberg's animated 'zombie'-puppets share the characteristic of attracting and repulsing audiences. As established by now, representations of excess can be read in the way that bodies are represented in both *Golgotha* and *Experimentet*. I propose that there are two reasons why both these artworks elicit the attraction-repulsion paradox in viewers. Firstly, it is because they represent aspects of the taboo – that which is prohibited in relation to social customs that are sacred and forbidden based on moral judgement and, at times, religious beliefs. Secondly, it is because they provide representations of degraded bodies that are the "epitome of incompleteness" (Bataille 1984:26), and that show the interconnected process of life-death-birth as Bakhtin explains it with reference to his notion of grotesque realism. I want to engage in a discussion of both these reasons for the attraction-repulsion response to the two artworks. I will start with the notion of the taboo, after which I will engage with the notion of the incompleteness of the grotesque body.

Bataille's notion of the taboo can be traced in a number of his writings, but it stands out most prominently in his book *Eroticism* (written 1957, translated 1962, 1986), and to a lesser extent, *The Accursed Share*. Michael Richardson explains Bataille's rationale for the institution of the taboo as follows: regulation is an integral part of human society and people need to work in order for society to function. But work needs to be protected from violence, which is an inescapable force that is connected to the sacred,³⁸ and this calls for a means of regulating activity within society. This is

³⁸ Bataille's understanding of the sacred is mainly centred on a "radical subversive negativity" (Gill 1995:xv). In context of his writings, the sacred is not seen as an organising principle, but rather as a violent, transgressive, excessive domain that had to be repressed or, at least, controlled. Bataille saw the sacred realm as a realm of danger and the loss of meaning (Bataille 1985:240).

the foundation of the institution of the taboo, which establishes the conditions for work-related activities. But, as Richardson explains, a desire to violate the prohibitions instituted by the taboo is an inevitable part of human nature (1998:51). In Bataille's view, the taboo's function is not to deny and forbid completely, but it serves rather to assign a certain limit. For Bataille, this limit is defined by the idea of transgression; such transgression is associated with the sacred, which can be defined as "the moment of rupture when *the excluded* element that is forbidden by the taboo is brought into focus" (Richardson 1998:51). Bataille explains that the play between taboo and transgression exists in a complex moral relation. As Bataille states: "Transgression does not deny the taboo but transcends and completes it." (1986:63). Transgression is therefore the limit that is set on that which is prohibited, but not entirely denied.

Cohen's gesture of using skulls as shoes can be seen as a transgressive act that violates a taboo. The commodification of human remains and their exhibition in public can be seen a transgression of Western social norms. It is not a taboo that is prescribed by religion or specific social customs, but it is one that is generally implicitly accepted as a taboo. A skull is associated with death and medical procedures; therefore it could be seen as disrespectful and inappropriate to use it outside the context of scientific research. In Djurberg's animations transgressions of the taboo can also be observed. The acts of molestation performed by the priests in the animation *Greed* give visual form to a taboo that is a sensitive issue in Catholic communities worldwide.

In *The Accursed Share* Bataille writes that transgression was a vital part of the social fabric of earlier societies (he provides the sacrificial rituals of the ancient Aztecs as an example) (Bataille 1986:87). This was mainly seen in the form of the festival, where transgression operated freely and therefore partially served the regulatory function of the taboo (Richardson 1998:51). Richardson explains how in more complex societies³⁹ this reciprocal relationship between taboo and transgression is undermined. Consequently, the taboo comes to be associated with the unbreakable law, which is associated with prescribing and regulating 'good' behaviour. Transgression is then excluded entirely, as it comes to be associated with the refusal

³⁹ With the term 'complex societies' Richardson refers to Bataille's understanding of the 'modern' world in the generalised sense of the term – in Bataille's words: "the world of modern industry, or, the bourgeois world" (Bataille 1991:136).

to accept the authority of the taboo.⁴⁰ This means that within our own contemporary complex societies transgression does not regulate taboo in the way that festivals once did (Richardson 1998:51). According to Bataille, transgression became the entitlement of the rebellious individual who seeks to destroy the taboo instead of maintaining it.

Golgotha can be read in the light of Bataille's account of the taboo. As mentioned above, Bataille insists that taboos appeared in response to the necessity of banishing violence from the course of everyday life (Bataille 1986:55). He explains that the taboos he regards as fundamental affect two radically different fields: death and reproduction. This presents a difficulty, as these two fields are complete opposites. Death and birth are, of course, opposite processes, yet these processes can be reconciled, according to Bataille. "The death of the one being is correlated with the birth of the other, heralding it and making it possible. Life is always a product of the decomposition of life" (Bataille 1986:55). This shows that Bataille saw life and death as a circular process, but the way that Bataille thinks about death and viewers' response to it also communicates the dynamics of the attraction-repulsion paradox: "Violence, and death signifying violence, have a double meaning. On the one hand the horror of death drives us off, for we prefer life; on the other an element at once solemn and terrifying fascinates us and disturbs us profoundly" (1986:45).

Bataille talks about "the corruption following on death" (1986:54) in the cycle of life-death-birth. This particular notion of Bataille proves helpful in a discussion of Cohen's use of skulls in his work. In contrast to Bakhtin's assertion that the cycle of life-death-birth is a positive force because it relates to regeneration, Bataille insists that "life is none the less a negation of death", because "it [life] condemns it [death] and shuts it out" (1986:54). He talks about the "mingled horror and fascination aroused in us by decay" (1986:55). Bataille continues his discussion on the 'corruption following on death' by explaining how the phase of decomposition was the greatest moment of anguish for 'primitive people'⁴¹ (1986:54). He makes the suggestion that the survivors around a decomposing corpse experienced an animosity projected towards them by the dead body; he suggests that it is "a function of the rites of mourning to appease" the dead (1986:54). Afterwards they feel that the whitening of the bones testifies to

⁴⁰ In Christian societies transgression is connected to evil (Richardson 1998:51).

⁴¹ Bataille refers to 'primitive people' in the broadest sense of the term. Michael Richardson states that his "study of so-called primitive and exotic peoples was given no privileged status as ethnographic subjects" (1994:52).

this appeasement. The whitening bones are objects of reverence to them and “draw the first veil of decency and solemnity over the activity of corruption” (Bataille 1986:54-55). This means that the white bones release the survivors from experiencing disgust. In Bataille’s words: “They put an end to the close connections between decomposition, the source of an abundant surge of life, and death” (Bataille 1986:56).

Rather than being a negation of death, Cohen’s performance in the streets of New York is the opposite of it – in fact, it makes viewers acutely aware of death. Bataille’s obscure anthropological observations on primitive people’s fear of decomposition and the consequent appeasement they found in the whitening of bones could be related to Cohen’s walk on the ‘skullettos’. There is a sense of horror aroused in us by his transgressive act of walking on the remaining fragments of a human body. Through the process of walking on the skulls through the city towards Ground Zero, it is almost as though viewers experience some sort of mollification (or appeasement) towards the lives lost in 9/11. This means that if Cohen’s performance is analysed with Bataille’s abovementioned theory in mind, then the artist’s performance with the skulls could testify his dealing with the trauma of death. By presenting the act of walking on skulls under the defense of art, viewers are more likely to accept his act of transgression. His violation of a taboo affects the audience either in two ways: on the one hand, his act of transgression can affect us in a soothing way (if we see his act as a cathartic release of trauma and fear); on the other hand, it can provoke shock and disgust because of the visual reference to human remains that reference death.

Anthony Julius argues in *Transgressions: The Offences of Art* (2002), that taboo-breaking, in terms of the production of visual art, often wounds our sensibilities, causing an anxious response and not leaving space for the imagination. Kieran Cashell provides another definition of the transgressive in his book *Aftershock: The Ethics of Contemporary Transgressive Art* (2009), in which he defines aesthetic transgression as “any act of violation presented under the alibi of art” (Cashell 2009:1). Included under the umbrella term of postmodernism, transgressive art is a product of post-twentieth-century vanguard culture. Julius distinguishes the aesthetic of transgression as “an art committed to violating socio-consensual, but importantly non-legal taboos” (Cashell 2009:2), supported by Bataille’s notion of ‘expenditure’

and the 'constructive nihilism' of Friedrich Nietzsche.⁴² Julius talks about the moralising judgements that are inevitably made in reviewing transgressive artworks.⁴³ "Taboo-breaking artworks put under threat certain under-articulated or unspoken sentiments and beliefs to which their audiences may be taken to adhere" (Julius 2002:111). The threats created by transgressive artworks are thus directed at the audience – the intention is for the viewer to be affected by the violation of taboo presented or enacted in the artwork. The depiction of sexualised violence in Djurberg's animations in *Experimentet* can also be considered taboo-breaking in this sense. The acts of molestation performed by the priests in *Greed* are especially threatening in the way that they undermine certain 'under-articulated or unspoken sentiments and beliefs', as I will explain in the discussion to follow.

Anthony Julius argues that today's taboo-breaking artworks stand in contrast to the medieval and early-modern carnivals, in which rigid hierarchies were momentarily and symbolically subverted. This is because contemporary taboo-breaking art "do not have an assigned place within our culture, but instead float freely, taking us by surprise in a series of ambushes" (Julius 2002:192). Julius suggests that today art can be said to "breed mistrust" (2002:192), while the carnival culture of the Middle Ages never caused such anxieties. Bakhtin's description of the carnivalesque in *Rabelais and His World* (1984) explains how people in medieval society led two lives: the one official, and the other of the carnival and public spectacles. "The first was monolithic, sombre, hierarchical; the second was full of ambivalent laughter, sacrileges, the violation of all things sacred, disparagement and unseemly behaviour, and familiar contact with everybody and everything" (Julius 2002:193). The rituals of the 'feast of fools', for example, consisted of the grotesque degradation of various church rituals and symbols. By imitating acts of gluttony, disrobing, indecent gestures and drunken orgies on the altar table, such rituals transferred that which was considered sacred to the material bodily level. Similar notions of degradation can be seen in Djurberg's animation *Greed*, with the indecent acts performed by the priests

⁴² The existential nihilism of Nietzsche posits that there is no objective meaning, purpose or intrinsic value in life. He asserts that nihilism is a characteristic of the modern age, because of the decline of Christianity and the rise of physiological decadence (Buchanan 2010:345).

⁴³ Julius believes that the two positions in judging transgressive works, that of the artist and that of the moralist, cannot be reconciled, and that there is no third position available to harmonise the contradictory perspectives. It is for this reason that Julius advocates an account of transgressive artworks that breaks free from the law, does not concern itself with questions of censorship and understands the historicity of the transgressive (Julius 2002:197).

upon the bodies of the naked girls, and especially with the priest's interaction with a donkey (Fig. 51).

In *Greed* the scenes of the naked young girls performing sexual acts with each other are juxtaposed with other scenes. A particular sequence of events in *Greed* shows an overweight woman emerging from a hole dug by two old men. As mentioned in Chapter One, milk starts flowing copiously from the large woman's breasts and the two men start drinking it simultaneously (Fig. 30). Milk flows over their faces and unto the ground, where a donkey licks it up. When the donkey leaves the breast milk scene the camera follows it, panning over a scene where three girls climb onto one another to form a clumsy tower. Following this is a scene where a priest holds a naked girl's hands with her back towards him, stretching her arms open. Blood is dripping down her torso from between her breasts (Fig. 47). The priest leans over, burying his face in her blonde curls, after which he suddenly snaps her up under his robe.

This sequence of scenes recalls the degrading gestures in the medieval carnival of the 'feast of fools'. Bakhtin emphasises that grotesque degradation, including the spectacle of the carnival, constitutes a topsy-turvy turn of the world on both a material and cosmic level. He talks about the logic of the "inside out", the "turnabout" and the "world inside out" that could be seen in the numerous "parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings" in the carnival life of medieval times (Bakhtin 1984:11). Bakhtin believed that the carnival was the genuine feast of time, "the feast of becoming, change and renewal" (Bakhtin 1984:10), and that it was opposed to all that was finite and completed.⁴⁴ The carnival affirmed the very order that it ridiculed, by demonstrating what the social order could incorporate, and by creating its own exaggerated, ruthless variations on the official order's most sanctioned practices. By juxtaposing an array of depictions of 'indecentcy' in *Greed* Djurberg creates an atmosphere that recalls the 'feast of fools' – but instead of 'affirming the order that it ridicules', *Greed* asserts the problematic aspects of patriarchal power. Also, the way the camera pans over the various scenes create a sense of vertigo that resonates with Bakhtin's notion that the carnival temporarily turned the "world inside out" (Bakhtin 1984:11).

⁴⁴ Julius, however, sees the carnival as a kind of "regulated chaos" (Julius 2003:193), in the sense that it was planned for, that its duration was limited, and it did not bring irrevocable changes to the world. According to Julius, "it turned the world upside down, and then turned it back again" (2003:193).

Bakhtin's view of the carnival therefore differs from today's view on taboo-breaking artworks. In contemporary society we do not lead lives fully sanctioned by custom and by the institutional authority of the church and the state. Taboo-breaking art "eludes our moral calendar", says Julius; such works "do not invite our participation, they are not traditional, we cannot 'place' them" (2002:194). Julius suggests that we, as viewers, are objectively distanced from their making and their influence. They often tend to be threatening works and their jokes are only slightly related to the laughter of the carnival. For Bakhtin, laughter in medieval times overcame fear, for it did not know any inhibitions or limitations. In a similar way, the humour in the acts performed by the clay puppets in *Greed* is also threatening. The depictions of indecent gestures performed by the puppets overcome inhibitions and limitations, but they do not overcome fear. The uninhibited acts performed by the puppets recall Bakhtin's description of the carnival as the "feast of becoming, change and renewal" that turns the "world inside out" (Bakhtin 1984:10-11). Yet despite these allusions to the positive regenerating nature of the medieval carnival, a threatening sense of disquiet lingers after watching *Greed* – an effect that the other two animations produced for *Experimentet* also has on the viewer.

Even though today's taboo-breaking artworks are not related to the laughter of medieval carnivals, they still offer some kind of cathartic release, or 'victory', over that which is implicitly forbidden in contemporary society. Therefore I disagree with Julius' condemning judgement that taboo-breaking artworks 'demoralise' their audience. On the contrary, both *Golgotha* and *Experimentet* present viewers with representations of the body-violating taboos in ways that are not necessarily a negative reflection of human experience, but instead a recognition of such experiences. While both these artworks present aesthetic transgressions as "an act of violation presented under the alibi of art", as Cashell defines it (2009:1), both are representing these 'acts of violation' not only for the sake of breaking taboos, but for communicating specific social injustices. For this reason I argue that both *Golgotha* and *Experimentet* do the opposite of 'demoralising'. Through the paradoxical dynamic of attracting and repulsing its audiences, both artworks encourage viewers to confront social injustices through means of aesthetic transgression.

I will now turn to Bataille's notion of incompleteness of the grotesque body as a second reason for why both artworks under discussion elicit the attraction-repulsion paradox. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, when the attraction-repulsion paradox relates to the body, it is often associated with bodies that represent aging, decay or death – "bodies marked by time and disease", as Cristofovici puts it

(2009:5). Bodies that represent aging, decay or death often takes the form of the grotesque body, and this body is incomplete because it transgresses its own boundaries. It can therefore be argued that, because of its incompleteness, the grotesque body also evokes simultaneous reactions of attraction and repulsion.

The body represented in the tradition of grotesque realism and the carnivalesque also provokes a paradoxical state. Grotesque forms are characterised by incompleteness: firstly, because they are constituted by the combination of plant, animal and human forms; and secondly, because the grotesque body is “in the act of becoming” (Bakhtin 1984:317). Bakhtin explains that “it is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body” (Bakhtin 1984:317). According to Bakhtin (1984:25), an example of the grotesque body in the ‘act of becoming’ is found in the Kerch terracotta figurines from ancient Rome portraying two old hags who are close to death, but their faces twisted with laughter and their bellies swollen with pregnancy. Bakhtin describes this a highly ambivalent image: “it is a pregnant death, a death that gives birth” (1984:25), and these forms “seemed to be interwoven as if giving birth to each other” (1984:32). The decaying flesh of the senile old hags are combined with the flesh of new life, and therefore their forms remain incomplete, ambivalent. “Life is shown in its two-fold contradictory process; it is the epitome of incompleteness,” writes Bakhtin, “and such is precisely the grotesque concept of the body” (1984:26).

The view of this kind of body is one of carnality – emphasising changes in nature in terms of eating, drinking, sex and excretions by means of bodily orifices. In other words, the carnivalesque image of the body is one that emphasises its carnality and its changeability, and thus it is grotesque. The bodily elements which are accentuated are “those parts of the body that are open to the outside world” (Bakhtin 1984:26), the parts through which the world enters the body, or emerges through it. In terms of visual representation, the focal point is the orifices and the reproductive areas of the body – the gaping mouth, the nose, the breasts, the genital organs, the phallus, the bowels, the pregnant belly. It is with the interaction and interchange of these parts of the body, which can transgress its own limits, that “the beginning and the end of life are closely linked and interwoven” (Bakhtin 1984:317).

As explained in Chapter One, Djurberg’s depiction of a self-mutilating female puppet in *Cave* can be read as a representation of the grotesque body. My assertion in the current chapter is to propose that Djurberg’s representation in *Cave* is the visual equivalent of Bakhtin’s notion that the grotesque body is the ‘epitome of

incompleteness'. There are various elements in *Cave* that suggest the cycle of life-death-birth. The female puppet's bloated belly is the first indication that she may be pregnant; the other visual indicator is the milk that is later squeezed from her breast (Fig. 29). The self-mutilation of her body becomes increasingly brutal as the film continues. Eventually all her limbs are ripped off, with the severed limbs torturing the rest of her body by poking and tearing it. As viewers, we may expect death, but she never dies, even when her body is reduced to only a head and a torso with a monstrously swollen vagina (Fig. 28). This single grotesquely deformed body of the female puppet signifies both pregnancy and death, mainly through the way in which the orifices and reproductive areas of her body are depicted. It is in the way that the female body in *Cave* transgresses its own limits that the beginning and ending of life are interwoven. The cycle of life-death-birth is portrayed through the contradictory process of regeneration and destruction that the puppet's body undergoes.

Another scene from one of Djurberg's films for *Experimentet* can be compared to grotesque realism's ambivalent relationship between life and death. As mentioned, a particular scene in *Greed* shows two naked girls violently tearing at each other and merging into one another. The medium of clay allows the scene to be depicted crudely – with the figures ripping off each other's clay flesh, revealing their metal armature skeletons, and then showing the joining of the fragmented flesh (Fig. 50).⁴⁵ In this way the boundaries between death and life becomes blurred.

Bakhtin's particular conception of grotesque realism as the 'epitome of incompleteness' is a positive and liberating one. "Actually the grotesque liberates man from all the forms of in-human necessity that direct the prevailing concept of the world," writes Bakhtin. "The principle of laughter and the carnival spirit on which the grotesque is based destroys this limited seriousness [...]. It frees human consciousness, thought, and imagination for new potentialities" (1984:49).

In a similar way, Bataille also sees the violation of taboos through transgression as a liberating force. To summarise Bataille's idea of the taboo: in medieval carnivals transgression was allowed, but in contemporary Western society transgression is not allowed, because it is associated with the "inviolable law which regulates behaviour

⁴⁵ The graphic depiction of the tearing and merging of flesh is reminiscent of the scene in Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel* where Gargamelle gives birth to the giant Gargantua. In this fantastical tale Gargamelle's labour began at the precise moment in which her right intestine fell out as a result of her overeating of tripe (the intestines of fattened ox). Her labour and the falling out of the intestine connects the devoured tripe with those who devour it – therefore blurring the boundaries between animal flesh and consuming human flesh.

in a prescriptive way”, therefore becoming associated with what is ‘good’ (Richardson 1998:51). This poses the problem that transgression has become the prerogative of the rebellious individual who seeks to destroy the taboo, instead of maintaining it (Richardson 1998:51). For Bataille, transgression needs to be the limit set on that which is prohibited, but not entirely denied. Transgression is therefore necessary so that it can “transcend and complete” (Bataille 1986:63) the taboo. In this way the taboo, and the transgression that accompanies it, becomes a necessary and liberating force. Visual art, in particular performance and video art such as *Golgotha* and *Experimentet*, is an effective vehicle through which to practise transgression without destroying the taboo. This means that the artist, through the process of creating a work, has an avenue for practising transgression in ways perhaps similar to the way this was done in medieval carnivals. Artworks that pull the viewer between attraction and repulsion are generally transgressing some kind of boundary (whether it be social, moral or religious). As Bataille (1986:68) explained: taboo and transgression reflect the two contradictory urges of being driven away by terror and drawn in by fascination.

This leads me to the conclusion that representations of excess in both Djurberg’s and Cohen’s works have the potential of producing a positive and liberating affect on viewers, despite the repulsiveness of some of the scenes in their films. *Experimentet* and *Golgotha* are intriguing artworks because both provoke visceral reactions in viewers. As mentioned in the introduction to the thesis, ‘visceral reactions’ are emotionally, as opposed to rationally, determined. A subjective response is inevitable in the viewing of artworks, as we bring our own positions to bear on how we perceive it. Kathryn Smith (1998:35) suggests, “In this ‘visceral reaction’ we are at once repulsed, but compelled to look. Once we have recognised our immediate response, we enter the realm of knowledge structures”. This means that we can only truly grasp the meaning behind representations of excess once we recognise and acknowledge the paradoxical dynamic of attraction and repulsion.

This chapter described the way in which representations of excess in both *Experimentet* and *Golgotha* simultaneously attract and repulse audiences. I explained how the paradox of attraction-repulsion operates in two ways: on the one hand, by depicting transgression and taboo, and on the other, through representations of the grotesque body that always remains incomplete. The next chapter presents a discussion of my own art practice in relation to the theoretical framework established in my thesis thus far.

CHAPTER FIVE

Representations of excess in the exhibition *Excess Becoming Flesh*

In this chapter I discuss representations of excess in relation to the body in my own art practice. The theoretical framework established in the previous chapters serves to inform the discussion of my own work, which consists of a large-scale collage and a series of sculptures made of felt. The practical component of my research, with its central thematic concern with the body in relation to notions of excess, served as a springboard for the theoretical arguments pursued thus far in this thesis. My discussions and analysis of the two works by Djurberg and Cohen in relation to excess and the body helped me to systematically theorise these thematic concerns I intuitively pursued in my practice. By means of the investigation of the work of these two established artists I hope to have created a theoretical framework in which to situate a discussion of my own work. In this chapter I will therefore go about discussing my artworks as representations of excess in relation to the following themes outlined in the thesis: the grotesque body, the fragmented body, the body spectacle, *vanitas* imagery, the mimicry and masquerade of femininity, taboo and transgression, and the attraction-repulsion paradox as part of viewers' response to imagery of excess in relation to the body in art.

A work that proved to be a seminal starting point for my own practical research is Hieronymus Bosch's sixteenth-century painting, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. I created an artwork that references Bosch's triptych, a large-scale collage work entitled *Saturated Spectacle: After Hieronymus Bosch* (2011) (Fig. 24). The image, without the frame, is 140 cm high and 124 cm wide, measurements that are almost identical to the central panel of Bosch's triptych. As mentioned in the introduction to the thesis, my collage is a contemporary interpretation of the central panel of Bosch's triptych. In imitation of Bosch's panel, my collage depicts a fantasy world where naked men and woman cavort among various plants, animals and oversized fruit. The background of the collage is made up of nature scenes taken from old photographic books. It includes scenes of clouds, snow-capped mountain ranges, waterfalls, woods, dams, hilltops and a sprawling green lawns. The foreground consists of naked figures interacting with the plants, animals and large fruits. The pictures of the naked figures included in the collage were sourced from a commercial sex instruction book. The figures are therefore eroticised, but not pornographic, as no

genitalia are shown. The collage can therefore be said to represent a kind of sexually liberated utopia where humans are one with nature, where food is abundant, and where people can satisfy their sexual needs freely and openly.

The rest of the works that form part of my exhibition *Excess Becoming Flesh* consist of a series of felt sculptures. The sculptures function as visual representations of notions of excess. Accordingly, they reflect some of theories outlined in the thesis thus far, of which the theory on the grotesque body is the most striking. A sculpture of a woman's torso, entitled *Womb/Wound* (2011) (Fig. 68), has a pregnant belly with a hole on it, and the back of the torso has a number of boils growing on it. Like most of my sculptures, the work is made mainly from natural beige Karakul wool. The hole in the belly represents a wound – it is 23 cm deep and about 10 cm wide, and it is a fleshy type of pink that becomes red towards the deep end. The boils on the back of the female body are also red, and they seem to protrude awkwardly and painfully through the woollen beige 'skin' of the figure. *Scar* (2011) (Fig. 69) is a hanging sculpture of an abstract shape resembling a severed human limb that has a scar in it and a pair of hands protruding from its end. *Scar* is a more abstract work than *Womb/Wound*, because it does not represent an immediately recognisable human shape. Instead, it only suggests the human form through the shape and size of the hanging limb-like structure and the inclusion of the felted hands. The end part of the 'limb' in *Scar* is dipped in white enamel paint, therefore making it almost seem like a garment instead of a limb. In a similar way the bottom edge of *Womb/Wound* is dipped in white enamel paint – therefore it is also an ambivalent work that can either be read as a garment or a body sculpture. Another piece included in *Excess Becoming Flesh* is a replica of a human skull made by means of the process of felting beige Karakul wool. Entitled *Memento Mori I* (2011) (Fig. 70), the felt skull is the first work in a series of felt sculptures representing specific parts of the human skeleton. The beige colour of the natural Karakul wool is similar to the hue of human bone. The texture and organic quality of the Karakul felt, together with its sturdiness despite its malleability, makes it seem both skin-like and bone-like – a quality that makes it ideal for creating sculptures that represent parts of the body. The abovementioned artworks are examples of separate pieces that are included in the series of felt sculptures.⁴⁶ I will discuss the series of felt works as a whole, and refer

⁴⁶ At the time of writing this chapter I was still in the process of producing felt sculptures to be included in the examination of my art practice. For this reason it is impossible to refer to every sculpture included in the exhibition, as some of them still had to be made. Therefore I discuss

to the abovementioned sculptures specifically in order to situate a discussion of them within the theoretical framework of this thesis.

As mentioned in the introduction, my analysis of Cohen's and Djurberg's work is placed within the context of an international art circuit. However, in the discussion of my own artworks I situate the analysis of representations of excess in relation to the body in a South African context. The collage work specifically incorporates South African plant and animal species. The images of these local visual references are combined with other, more generalised and globalised imagery in order to create a fantasy environment that gives the impression of being located in South Africa. The series of felt sculptures is less overtly 'local' in their visual references. The series is rather a generalised exploration of the form of the body and the way it can reference the circle of life-death-birth.

Having provided brief descriptions of the works produced for my exhibition, I will now discuss the works in more detail by means of situating them within the theoretical framework outlined in the thesis thus far. The collage work, *Saturated Spectacle (After Hieronymus Bosch)*, references notions of the mimicry and masquerade of femininity, the body spectacle as a critique of capitalism, and notions of taboo and transgression. The series of felt sculptures is based on the theories on the grotesque body and the fragmented body. Certain sculptures within the series reference the tradition of *vanitas* and *memento mori*. I also suggest that the series of felt sculptures, because of the nature of the medium of wool and the subject matter it depicts, operates in terms of the attraction-repulsion paradox, as outlined in the previous chapter. The collage will be discussed first, followed by an analysis of the series of felt sculptures.

My intention in making *Saturated Spectacle (After Hieronymus Bosch)* was to create a contemporary visual reference to the central panel of Bosch's triptych. I wanted to visually reflect some of Bosch's sixteenth-century concerns in a contemporary South African context. As mentioned, I incorporated pictures of specifically South African (and generally southern African) plant and animal species in the collage. I intuitively used the more overtly 'South African' pictures towards the bottom half of the collage, where most of the figures and objects are lifted from the background. Ranging from three to nine millimetres, the slight increase in elevation of the pictures towards the

the conceptualisation of the felt sculptures as a whole, but refer only to specific completed works.

bottom makes the entire scene look more grounded. Some of the pictures of figures and objects towards the bottom half of the collage are raised in order to create a layering effect that makes the artwork more visually pleasing. The fantasy nature scene is highly constructed and not seamless, so I therefore elevated the pictures in order to create a slight illusion of depth of field.

Most of the plants in the foreground of the collage are *fynbos* – a group of plant species that is indigenous and unique to South Africa's Western Cape province. I chose these types of plants not only because of their intricate appearance, but also because the shapes of some of the flowers, in particular the Proteas, reminded me of the unfamiliar organic pod-structures in Bosch's painting (Figs. 57 & 58). The strange shapes and textures and distinctive colours of *fynbos* flowers may seem exotic to a foreigner, while I associate them with what is familiar, having lived in the Western Cape all my life. In combining the *fynbos* flowers with other collage elements, I have turned what is familiar to me into something exotic. At certain places I have deconstructed the Protea and reattached its petals so that it starts to look like Bosch's sixteenth-century creations (Figs. 59 & 60). The animals represented in the collage are also mostly indigenous to southern Africa. In the distance there are African elephants, giraffes and various types of game buck on the fields. Towards the foreground there are leopards, zebras, buffalo, monkeys, deer and even a few reptile creatures, otters and insects (Fig. 61). On the left side of the picture there is a group of birds, including owls, doves, eagles and water-birds.

The *fynbos* and South African animals in the foreground of the picture, however, are not the main focus of the artwork. It is the plethora of naked men and women frolicking among, on top and in-between the flowers, fruit and animals that draw the spectators' attention. The figures seem to be engaged in acts of sexual intercourse. However, as is the case in Bosch's painting, the genitals of the figures are not exposed. The bodies of the men and women are all in good shape and seem healthy and relatively young. This is also the case in *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, but in Bosch's painting the figures almost seem childlike in their ageless appearance (Fig. 62). The naked figures in Bosch's work radiates a sense of innocence that is, to some extent, lost in my collage. As mentioned, I found the images of the naked figures for my collage in an instructional sex book. As a result, the body postures and gestures of the figures are eroticised. Each page in the sex book shows a heterosexual couple interacting in some sexual act. With about half the figures in the collage I removed single figures from their sexual context and juxtaposed them in a different situation. There are a few cases where women appearing to reach sexual

climax (with head thrown back, eyes closed and mouth slightly open) sit on top of an eagle, or a zebra, or an otter or a flower (Fig. 63). Men are depicted embracing owls, monkeys or large fruits, plants or shells (Fig. 64). I also show couples, engaged in a sexual embrace, copulating in large Proteas (Fig. 65), or on top of mushrooms, leopards or insects (Fig. 66). With these pictures I generally hide the areas where the bodies meet (the pelvic area) in order to desexualise the image to some extent (Fig. 67).

The way that women are generally portrayed in sex manuals (or in photographs for pornographic purposes) can be critically analysed with reference to Irigaray's concept of the role of excess in mimesis. In sex books, and accordingly the imagery I used in my collage, the female body is symbolically represented as an object of sexual pleasure for a phallogentric audience, or it depicts the way females are generally considered to represent themselves in order to be attractive. The collage incorporates an excessive number of these pictures where women are shown reaching sexual climax, or depicted as enabling men to reach sexual climax. By incorporating this kind of imagery in my collage, the female body is mimicked to excess so as to expose the structures inherent in phallogentric power relations. As mentioned in Chapter Three, Irigaray's mimetic practice is determined by excess centred on the female body. In this way the strategies of mimicry are used in order to critique phallogentric power relations. I see the repetitive use of the pictures of females enabling sexual pleasure through their appearance as a mimetic practice. Therefore the excess in *Saturated Spectacle (After Hieronymus Bosch)* is, to some extent, centred on the naked female figures.

The actions performed by the men and women (mostly represented in couples or sexual partners) in my collage can be said to represent aspects of Irigaray's mimicry and masquerade of femininity. Because of the nature of the imagery in a sex book, the facial expressions of the figures seem false; therefore the figures in my collage represent superficial and manipulated depictions of desire. The facial expressions of the women, in particular, look manipulated. According to Irigaray "mimicry is a role that is historically assigned to the feminine" (1985:76), which means that a woman "must assume the feminine role deliberately" (1985:76). This can be observed in *Saturated Spectacle (After Hieronymus Bosch)* in the way in which the sexual acts performed by the figures emphasise the way that femininity is constructed. All the women in the collage can be said to assimilate notions of femininity. For Irigaray the role of a woman is to perform this assimilation of femininity: "Her function in patriarchy is that of the mirror, as a result of her 'otherness' reflecting back to man

his ‘sameness’” (Robinson 2006:28). For Irigaray, the term masquerade denotes ‘femininity’ that is constructed by men in both patriarchal and phallogentric structures “to mark the other of their same” (Robinson 2006:33). Irigaray explains her notion of masquerade by stating that “a man is a man from the outset”, whereas “a woman has to become a normal woman”, that is, a woman “has to enter into the *masquerade of femininity*” (Irigaray 1985:133-34). All the women depicted in the collage seem to be mimicking the assigned ‘femininity’ erected by patriarchy and phallogentrism.

In line with ‘appropriate’ bookshop-friendly sex books only the breasts and buttocks of the naked couples are exposed and not their genitals. In a certain sense this makes the men seem castrated. As mentioned in Chapter Three, Lacan includes theories on masquerade into his structures of fetishism and castration. He makes a distinction between ‘being’ and ‘having’ the phallus – with the former being the prerogative of women and the latter, of men (Robinson 2006:33). Therefore, for Lacan, the masquerade is a unified concept of ‘femininity’, behind which is nothing but lack (Robinson 2006:33). The masquerade of femininity portrayed by the figures in my collage emphasises the lack of the phallus in both a literal and a symbolic sense. In the collage, this lack is suggested not only in the way that the women engage with the men, but also in the way that they are interacting with the various plants and animals.

The factor that makes *Saturated Spectacle (After Hieronymus Bosch)* striking is the eroticising of the naked figures in combination with plant and animal forms. It is this combination of representations of excess centred on a plethora of naked bodies that initially drew my attention to *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. The central panel of Bosch’s painting shows excess not only in the abundance of naked human figures, but also through the surplus of food and animals available. Excess is signalled in the way that the actions performed by the figures imply hedonism and carnality. My collage can therefore also be discussed in view of the body spectacle as a cultural critique of capitalism, as it is outlined in Chapter Two. I entitled the work *Saturated Spectacle* precisely because I see it as a spectacle staged with various bodies that hold the visual power and ability to hold the gaze of the spectator. I also see the work as reflecting Debord’s definition of the spectacle as a charade, as “the concrete inversion of life” (Debord 1977:No.2).

Saturated Spectacle (After Hieronymus Bosch) could be said to reflect Bataille’s view that the excess inherent in nature should be spent and not saved for future capitalist gain. The collage could be read as a Bataillean utopia in which people live in terms of

what the present moment offers, rather than saving for the future through capital accumulation. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Bataille saw his 'notion of expenditure' as performing a social function; therefore he focused on the mystery of economic activity through "tracing the exhausting detours of exuberance through eating, death and sexual reproduction" (Bataille 1991:13). Pictures that depict eating and sexual reproduction dominate the collage, thereby making it a representation of excess. It is precisely in these domains of human life, of eating and sexual reproduction, that excess is often most noticeable.⁴⁷ My collage could be said to reflect Bataille's critique of accumulation in that he insists that leisure, and the expenditure that it requires, is part of the core of the effective economy. As mentioned, in Bataille's view labour that only satisfies the need for accumulation is a perversion of genuine human needs. The way that the figures seem fully involved in the acts of 'expenditure' – of eating what is available in abundance and of satisfying their sexual needs – demonstrates that the people in this fantasy world have not "surrendered to the somnolence of production" (Bataille 1991:134) of the capitalist world, which bases its economy on scarcity. As established in Chapter Two, Bataille saw in capitalist economic principles a progressive dehumanisation of the communal relationships. The world depicted in my collage represents a Bataillean utopia because the people in it are purposefully not "living a mechanical existence – half ludicrous, half revolting – of things." (Bataille 1991:134). It rather represents a world of leisure where the excesses of nature are spent in dynamic exuberance through the "luxurious detours" of eating and sexual reproduction, which is the kind of world Bataille advocated.

My collage, together with the central panel of Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, also reflects aspects of Bataille's notion of taboo and transgression. As explained in the previous chapter, Bataille sees the foundation of the institution of the taboo as that which established the conditions for work-related activities. Yet, as Richardson states, a desire to violate the prohibitions instituted by the taboo is an inevitable part of human nature (1998:51). Thus, for Bataille, the taboo's function is not to deny completely, but rather to assign a certain limit, and this limit is defined by the idea of transgression (Richardson 1998:51). To a certain extent both Bosch's central panel of his triptych and my collage visualise transgression as Bataille defined it. Bosch's painting was specifically created for the viewing pleasure of a

⁴⁷ Representations of death or violence, however, are not present in the collage, but the depictions of grotesque bodily forms in my series of felt sculptures makes up for that which is missing in *Saturated Spectacle*.

private audience (Belting 2005:8); therefore the actions portrayed by the figures in the painting can be seen as transgressive because they push the limits of what might have been considered taboo at the time of its making. Bosch's triptych has been widely interpreted – some see it as a heretical masterpiece, others as an idiosyncratic illustration of the Creation. In his book on the painting Hans Belting views the central panel as a utopia – a view that I also reflect in my collage. The scandalous quality of Bosch's picture lies in its eroticism, which it is nevertheless expressed in biblical terms. Belting suggests that Bosch's intention was not for viewers to discover the sinfulness of the scene, as that would indicate the heretical (2005:7). Belting makes the assumption that Bosch's intention was neither to paint a paradise that depicts earthly sin nor Christian heaven – it was rather to represent an imaginary world of liberty (2005:7). The painting has been described as “an exotic derangement that turns us all into voyeurs, as a place filled with the intoxicating air of perfect liberty” (Belting 2005:7). In my view Bosch's world is a painted utopia that depicts his vision of humankind in a paradise unaffected by the Fall, and, accordingly, this is the scene I intended to (re)create with my collage.

Similar to Bosch's panel, *Saturated Spectacle (After Hieronymus Bosch)* also represents a voyeuristic view of a paradise that reflects notions of taboo and transgression. Various taboos are depicted in the painting and in my collage. The sexualised figures' interaction with animals possibly suggest bestiality, although I prefer to view this in innocent terms as humankind's playful harmony with the beasts of nature in an utopian world. The way that many of the figures are grouped together implies orgies, another Western social and sexual taboo. Some of the figures are drinking out of large pods or eating oversized fruits and berries, thereby depicting the taboo of gluttonous overindulgence. The transgressive nature of the acts of human (over-)indulgence portrayed in both the painting and my collage recalls Bataille's insistence that the desire to violate the prohibitions instituted by the taboo is an inevitable part of human nature. As mentioned, the idea of transgression is defined by the taboo's function to assign certain limits. In my view, this is what the central panel of *The Garden of Earthly Delights* is representing. It is depicting some of the taboos of society – in Bosch's case medieval Christian society, and in the case of my collage contemporary South African society. In only implying sexual liberty and not actually showing overtly explicit pornographic images, the transgression of the acts of the naked figures sets a limit on that which is prohibited, but not entirely denied.

I chose the medium of collage to make my own version of Bosch's painting as I see collage as a medium that is born out of excess (in the sense of a surplus of over-

production or redundancy after serving a main purpose). Printed photographic images in books and magazines become redundant as we, as postmodern industrialised society, are overwhelmed by their abundance. Also, in today's Westernised world we are constantly exposed to images of excess – in other words we are often exposed to sexually explicit imagery through entertainment – thereby turning us all (willingly or not) into voyeurs. By appropriating Bosch's eccentric view of 'utopia' by means of found images, I hope to facilitate critical reflection of the excess prevalent in contemporary culture.

I will now turn the discussion to the sculptures made by means of felting that form part of the exhibition. I started experimenting with felt-making after the completion of *Saturated Spectacle (After Hieronymus Bosch)*. The size and nature of the images cut for the collage work required careful handwork and hours of labour. I wanted my next work to also be labour intensive, and I challenged myself to learn a new medium. The series of felt sculptures produced for my exhibition consist of representations of the human form, in particular the female body. By means of hand-felting and needle-felting Karakul and Merino sheep wool I created three-dimensional pieces that can be seen as representations of notions of excess. Traditionally felt is associated with crafting, as the medium of felt is generally used for creating craft objects, children's toys and functional items such as hats and bags. My aim was to subvert these associations by means of creating sculptures made of felt that function in the gallery space instead of the applied arts. For me it was important, firstly, to investigate the formal possibilities presented by this particular medium, and secondly, to construct objects that challenge the signifying correlation that exists (historically) between the medium and the craft object.

Felt is an ancient form of textile that is made by using heat, friction and water to compact wool fibres. One of the most important properties of felt is that it not only affords protection from cold, but that it also insulates against extreme heat. It played an important role in the nomadic cultures of Central Asia since ancient times because few devices are needed for making it and the process is not bound to place⁴⁸ (Siebenmorgen, Tietzel & Oexle 2000:8). Contemporary artists working in felt follow the initial conceptual interest in the medium sparked by Joseph Beuys, whose

⁴⁸ Mongol tents are the best example of felt's protective and insulating quality, as the rolls of felt from which these round yurts are made maintain an even, pleasant temperature throughout the year. The ancient Greeks, followed by the Romans, also benefited from the insulating and protective properties of felt by making clothing from it (Siebenmorgen, Tietzel & Oexle 2000:8).

focus of interest was not on the process of making felt but on the various properties of the felt itself.⁴⁹ The craft of felting by hand – a craft that has remained prevalent among the nomadic peoples of Central Asia⁵⁰ – has aroused interest in artists, particularly woman artists, since the late 1980s (Schmitt 2000:27). But this interest is not so much in the industrially manufactured product, with which Joseph Beuys and Robert Morris were already working. For many of the woman artists working with felt today, it is the process of felting itself that has determined the statements made by the artists using it. The basic elements used in felt-making are water, wool and labour – a process that has not changed since prehistoric times. Sabina Heck and Katharina Thomas suggest that felters “follow a primal rhythm and rite in making felt” (2000:64). It is my own experience that a rhythmic, almost meditative, aspect is very much part of the felting process. Good-quality felt, with wool fibres that are evenly distributed and thoroughly compacted, requires concentration and carefully considered repetition. The rhythmic and repetitive process of felting – of vigorously rubbing the separate wool fibres until they compact together – in itself constitutes excess in terms of time and labour, which is one of the chief reasons why I wanted to continue using this process in the making of my sculptures dealing with notions of excess.

As mentioned, most of the artists or crafters working with felt today are women, and according to Schmitt (2000:27), they represent “an enclave which has little contact with the official contemporary art scene”. This is because felt is associated with materials used in the applied arts, or craft, rather than fine art. Furthermore, Schmitt states, “felt seems to have an inherent quality which causes many woman artists to recognise in it a medium which suitably reflects their situation” (2000:27). (The ‘situation’ that Schmitt talks about relates to the idea that women are generally and naturally maternal and protective, and that they traditionally occupy themselves with domestic handwork). I agree that it is the instinctive association with the hand-made

⁴⁹ One of his works, *Felt Suit* (1970), is a suit tailored from his own suits, and can be seen as an indirect self-portrait of the artist. The suit is an extension of Beuys’s felt sculptures, in which the insulating and protective qualities of felt are of significance (Tate 2008). Beuys explained his obsession with the warmth and the insulating properties of felt: “Not even physical warmth is meant... Actually I mean a completely different kind of warmth, namely spiritual or evolutionary warmth or the beginning of an evolution” (Beuys quoted in Tate 2008: <http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=26293>).

⁵⁰ The contemporary renewal of interest in felting follows the ethnological publications of Mary E. Burkett (Schmitt 2000:26).

and craft aspect of felt that makes it appealing to me and other female artists working with the medium.

As mentioned already, I became increasingly interested in the sculptural qualities of felt. In my experience of working with the medium, the process of adding layers, or attaching separate pieces of felt to another piece, reminds me of working with clay. I was surprised by the malleable quality of the wool fibres. The original materiality of felt was first explored by Robert Morris (Schmitt 2000:24). Working with industrial felt, he was interested in the shapes this heavy yet flexible material might form under the effect of the law of gravity when he cut a roll of felt and then fastened it to a wall with hooks⁵¹. In my own work, I am interested in exploring how much I can manipulate the material so that a sculpture that is essentially soft and malleable can keep its form. Karakul wool has a rougher texture than Merino wool, making the former the preferred wool for creating sculptural pieces. (I use coloured Merino wool mostly only to add detail to the sculptures.) The tactile quality of felt also an important aspect of its materiality. As mentioned, the sculpture *Womb/Wound* (Fig. 68) has a hole in its belly that it is big enough for the viewer to place a hand in. On exhibiting the sculpture in September 2011 I was surprised by how spectators felt the need to engage with the sculpture by inserting their hands in the 'wound'.

Robert Morris was also one of the first artists working with felt to point out one of the most prominent qualities inherent in the medium. "Felt has anatomical associations," says Morris; "it relates to the body – it's skin-like" (Morris quoted Tsouti-Schillinger in 2001:146). Felt has a relationship with the body - and it is this quality of felt that I am most interested in. It is the way in which the sculpted wool fibres represent the human body in all its vulnerability and fragility⁵² that drew me to it. The way in which felt relates to the body in a skin-like manner can be linked with theories of the grotesque body, whilst the association felt has with the body as vulnerable or fragile can be discussed in relation to the tradition of *vanitas* or *memento mori*.

⁵¹ Morris's installation *Untitled (Tangle)* (1967-8) is an example of how he explored the materiality of felt.

⁵² Célio Braga is an artist who makes soft felted fragments of limbs and organs. The sculptures are based on representations of the body where its organs, skin and blood become materials for experimentation, and the works are shaped according to openings – holes, scars and wounds. *Ohne Titel 1* (1999) is an example of his felt sculptures (Thomas 2000:99-101).

The notion that the grotesque body is a body in the process of becoming – a body that references the cycle of life-death-birth – is a pivotal point of reference for these sculptures. It is for this reason that some of the sculptures, in particular *Womb/Wound*, represent the female pregnant body, as this kind of body is the best form to depict the “unfinished becoming” (Bakhtin 1984:318) of the body represented in the tradition of grotesque realism. Felted wool stood out for me as the ideal medium to represent the female form, as qualities of felt, and the process of making it, relates to maternity and other female attributes. Therefore the relationship between felting and the female body will be explained in relation to Bakhtin’s notion of the grotesque body.

In Chapter One I explained how Bakhtin’s account of the material bodily principle in grotesque realism is related to the pregnant, unfinished body, “in which the life of one body is born from the death of the preceding, older one” (Bakhtin 1984:318). This gives the grotesque body its ambivalent nature. Also as explained in Chapter One, the essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation. For Bakhtin, degradation is fundamentally positive because it is intimately tied up with regeneration. The theme of death as renewal and the synthesis of death and birth are recurring themes in Bakhtin’s explanation of grotesque realism. The overall feeling evoked by the series of felt sculptures does communicate a sense of ambivalence. For instance, a pregnant belly (which signifies new life and ‘regeneration’) is depicted with a hole that denotes a scar or a wound (which signifies degradation and death). The felt sculpture *Womb/Wound* (2011) combines this reference to a pregnant belly together with references to degradation. In this way the sculpture visualises the cycle of life-birth-death – the “unfinished becoming” of the grotesque body that Bakhtin talks about.

The belly is a central image of grotesque realism and its fundamental function is paternity and maternity. As described in Chapter One, there is an essential link between eating, drinking, swallowing, laughter and death that can be traced back to the functions of the belly. Therefore some of the felt sculptures included in *Excess Becoming Flesh* include representations of bellies – often exaggerated and sometimes with wounds or objects protruding from them.

The felt sculptures are mostly depictions of female bodies because of the association of felt with femininity, maternity and protection.⁵³ Contemporary woman artists

⁵³ Contemporary fashion designers sometimes incorporate felt in their garments because of its flexibility, homogeneity and durability (Schmitt 2000:30).

working with the material have come closer to its origins. “For them felting is an act of caring and nurturing,” says Schmitt; it is a material which “unites the concepts of protection and warmth” (2000:30). The sculpture *Womb/Wound* therefore has associations with maternity not only because of the depiction of a pregnant belly, but also because of the protective and insulating properties of felt. In *Womb/Wound*, as well as in the other sculptures, I combine the rough and natural beige or charcoal coloured Karakul wool with the softer and brightly coloured Merino wool. These two different types of wool combine well, but the rough and spiky texture of the Karakul wool protrudes through the more delicate Merino wool, thereby contributing to the grotesque look of the garment. The combination of beige with fleshy pink and red gives *Womb/Wound* a visceral feeling that reminds one of the female reproductive organ. The medium of felt is, because of its formal properties, therefore ideal for representing grotesque forms of the female body.

Lacan’s concept of the fragmented body, or *corpse morcelé*, can also be applied to an analysis of my felt sculptures. As discussed in Chapter One, the notion of the fragmented body has to do with “images of castration, [...] dismemberment, dislocation [...], devouring [...], bursting open of the body” (Evans 1996:67). These kinds of images are evident in some of my felt sculptures. An example of one of these felt sculptures that depict images of the fragmented body is *Scar* (2011) (Fig. 69). As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, *Scar* is a hanging sculpture that resembles a severed limb with an opening in it that resembles a scar. The sculpture has a pair of hands protruding from its end, which also contributes to a sense of fragmentation. For Lacan, the concept of the fragmented body refers not only to images of the physical body, but also to any sense of fragmentation and disunity. My felt sculptures possibly evoke similar feelings, thereby reflecting the disorientation of the subject operating within the phenomenon of excess in visual representations.

For me, it is not only individual works that reflect the notion of the *corpse morcelé*, but also the series of felt sculptures as a whole. A sense of fragmentation and disunity is visually created in the way in which the felt sculptures are exhibited together in a single room in the gallery. Some are suspended from the ceiling, some are positioned on stands and others are lying on the ground. None of the sculptures represents the body in its totality – each sculpture only represents a part, or a fragment, of the human body. Some of the works are also more abstract, and therefore more ambivalent regarding human form, than others. *Womb/Wound* with its realistically portrayed breasts is, for instance, more recognisable as a human form than *Scar*, which is an abstract shape that subtly references a human limb. The

shape depicted in *Scar* can either be seen as an arm or a leg – it is up to the viewer to decide. The subtle feeling of dislocation created with representations of the fragmented body, such as *Scar*, contributes to the overall feeling of ambivalence in the exhibition.

A sense of ambivalence is also evident in the inherent properties of felt. As mentioned, felt is excellent for insulating against heat and cold, and therefore it is used for protective purposes. But handmade felt, depending on how it is prepared, is also quite fragile. In this way the skin-like property of felt reminded me of the vulnerability of the human body. Therefore I made a representation of a human skull with Karakul felt (Fig. 70). The natural beige colour of the Karakul wool gives the representation of the skull the same colour as bone. By representing a piece that is associated with hardness and protection in the soft medium of wool, I emphasise the fragility of human body parts. There is an inherent paradox in representing human bones in the form of felt. Both materials – bone and wool – are organic and associated with protective qualities, but wool is soft and malleable, while bone is not.

I also made the felt skull because of its association with *vanitas* imagery. In representing a skull in the malleable medium of wool, I emphasise its fragility, thereby making my own *memento mori* reference to evoke the transient nature of material life. Accordingly, the felt skull is entitled *Memento Mori I*, and it is the first work in a small sub-series of felt sculptures that are collectively entitled *Memento Mori*. The works in the series function as reminders of the vulnerability of the human body and the precarious nature of material life. The second work in the series, for instance, depicts the female pelvic bone, and it is made out of natural charcoal/dark brown Karakul wool.

Memento Mori, the sculpture series representing parts of the human skeleton, can also be linked with the paradox of attraction-repulsion, as it is outlined in Chapter Four. As mentioned, felt is associated with craft items and children's toys – there is an attractiveness to the material because of its soft fuzzy appearance. The felt skull, however, disrupts this association of the innocence of children's toys. A skull is associated with death and decay, and this subverts the notion of felt as a craft medium. (In a sense it is similar to the way that Djurberg subverts the generally innocent medium of claymation by creating clay animated narratives that are not meant for children's viewing and that tends to disturb even an adult audience.) The repulsiveness of objects of human decay – such as a skull – are made attractive by the medium of felt.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the attraction-repulsion response is often elicited by depictions of bodies associated with aging, decay or death. For me, the series of sculptures representing parts of the human skeleton are not the only sculptures that have this paradoxical effect on viewers. The rest of the felt sculptures included in my body of work function as representations of the grotesque body in the “act of becoming” (Bakhtin 1984:317), and therefore also evoke both attraction and repulsion in a viewer. The incompleteness that characterises the grotesque body can be observed in each of the felt sculptures. For me, all the felt sculptures function as depictions of the cycle of life-death-birth, as representations where “life is shown in its two-fold contradictory process”, as “the epitome of incompleteness” (Bakhtin 1984:26).

For me, felt also reflects paradoxical qualities, and therefore the genesis of felt is also of conceptual significance in my work. The material consists of animal hairs (in my work specifically Karakul and Merino sheep wool) which are compressed into shape by being compacted – therefore a sculptural process. Despite the control one has over determining the shapes to be sculpted in the material, the inner structure of the felt remains chaotic. This means that two polar principles are inherent in felt – order and chaos (Voigt 2000:44).⁵⁴

In the production of the felt sculptures I felt a sense of creating order out of chaos. The sculptures function as subtle visual manifestations of a number of the theories I investigated in this thesis. The series of felt sculptures stand in contrast to the collage work not only in terms of the media and difference in visual appearance, but also in terms of the way in which both works are representations of excess. My collage work, *Saturated Spectacle (After Hieronymus Bosch)*, is a direct visual reference to the central panel of Bosch’s *Garden of Earthly Delights* – a painting which is, in my opinion, one of the canonical artworks that represent excess. The collage work is therefore a straightforward engagement with notions of excess in terms of the mimicry and masquerade of femininity, the body spectacle as a critique of capitalism, and notions of taboo and transgression. The series of felt sculptures is also based on particular theories outlined in this thesis – including the notion of the grotesque body, the fragmented body, the tradition of *vanitas* and the attraction-

⁵⁴ The paradox of order versus chaos was also a significant factor in Joseph Beuys’s theory of sculpture. Voigt suggests that these two polar principals inherent in felt became the twin pillars for Beuys’s theory of sculpture: “chaos and order between which an eventful form process mediates” (Voigt 200:44).

repulsion paradox – yet they function as more subtle references to representations of excess.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I set out to theorise an increasing occurrence in contemporary art, both locally and abroad, whereby notions of excess are represented in relation to the body. My arguments were informed by the following theorists' writings: Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of grotesque realism, Jacques Lacan's notion of the fragmented body, Guy Debord's notion of the spectacle, George Bataille's notion of expenditure as well as his theory on taboo and transgression, Fredric Jameson's exposition of the waning of affect, and Luce Irigaray's theory of the role of excess in mimesis. I focused all arguments on a discussion of two artworks – Steven Cohen's film *Golgotha* and Nathalie Djurberg's video installation *Experimentet* – as examples of instances of representations of excess in contemporary art.

Chapter One explained how representations of the body in a grotesque, degraded or fragmented form affects viewers, as the familiar world becomes hostile when representations of the body becomes deformed. In this chapter I argued that representations of the grotesque body, as Bakhtin defines it, are evident in both the artworks investigated. I explained Bakhtin's understanding of degradation in relation to grotesque realism, and how extreme forms of the body presented in both *Golgotha* and *Experimentet* can be understood as degrading. I suggested that representations of degraded forms of the body, such as Cohen's 'skullettos' and Djurberg's puppet dismemberment, can lead to representations of regeneration – thereby implying that representations of the grotesque body possibly have a liberating effect on the spectator. Lastly, Chapter One briefly investigated Lacan's notion of the fragmented body to provide a psychoanalytic perspective on the effect that images of the fragmented, and therefore deformed, human body have on viewers. Essentially I argued that degraded representations of the human body could be positive, because they allow new meanings to be derived from the representation.

Chapter Two focussed on the way in which Cohen's use of the 'skullettos' in *Golgotha* can be read as a cultural critique of capitalism. I described the artist's performance in New York City as a spectacle centred on the body (hence a 'body spectacle') that offers commentary on a particular kind of capitalist excess. Bataille saw capitalism as hostile force that distorted social relations; therefore I situated a critique of capitalism in Bataille's notion of expenditure, in which he insists that

people should live for what the present moment offers rather than saving the excess that the world naturally produces. I also situated the discussion of the body spectacle of Cohen's performance in the context of Jameson's notion of the waning of affect, as he ascribes this condition to the 'depthlessness' of capitalist culture, attributed to the development of postmodernism. The intention in this chapter was to show how contemporary art has the responsibility to make viewers aware of the 'depthlessness' of material culture.

Chapter Three examined how representations of the female body visualise Irigaray's concept of the role of excess in mimesis. The theory discussed in the chapter is focused on an analysis of the three animations produced by Djurberg for *Experimentet*, as the grotesque female body is a recurring theme in each of the animations. I explained how Djurberg visualised the mimicry of the female body to excess (in *Greed*), leading to the masquerade of femininity (in *Forest*) and, consequently, to representations of hysteria (in *Cave*) – thereby revealing how the female condition is assigned in patriarchal culture. In essence the chapter explained how the symbolic representation of the female body is mimicked to excess in order to reveal the structures inherent in patriarchal and phallocentric power relations.

In Chapter Four I made the suggestion that representations of excess centred on the body elicit both attraction and repulsion in the spectator. I explained the paradoxical stance of simultaneous attraction and repulsion with reference to specific writings by Bataille and Bakhtin. I investigated Bataille's explanation of how the taboo both attracts and repulses us, and how transgression functions as the limit set on that which is prohibited, but not entirely denied. I argued that taboo-breaking in the production of visual art should serve specific purposes, as it the case in both *Golgotha* and *Experimentet*. In the chapter I also further investigated Bakhtin's account of the grotesque body as he sees it as characterised as an embodiment of incompleteness. I argued that the ambivalence of grotesque imagery, because of its 'unfinished becoming', also instigates a paradoxical response of attraction and repulsion.

The final chapter of the thesis realised the second aim of my theoretical research, which was to situate the practical component of my research – the body of work entitled *Excess Becoming Flesh* – within the theoretical framework established thus far. I discussed the collage work, *Saturated Spectacle (After Hieronymus Bosch)* in relation to the following theories: the notion of the mimicry of femininity, the body spectacle as a critique of capitalism, and notions of taboo and transgression. I also

discussed how the series of felt sculptures produced for *Excess Becoming Flesh* is based on the theories of the grotesque body and the fragmented body, and I explained how certain sculptures included in the series reference the tradition of *vanitas* and *memento mori*. Lastly I described how the felt sculptures operate within the attraction-repulsion paradox.

Each of the chapters included in the thesis has contributed to my argument that representations of the body in visual art can present different notions of excess, and that these notions can articulate particular conceptual concerns. I did so by means of a theoretically informed analysis of *Golgotha*, *Experimentet* and my own artworks. The theoretical framework provided some possible answers to the central question – what is the role of excess in representations of the body in contemporary visual art?

Representations of excess in relation to the human body can be seen as a form of aesthetic transgression. My intention with the theoretically informed discussion of *Experimentet*, *Golgotha* and my own work was to explain why aesthetic transgression is necessary. In my opinion, aesthetic transgression should not be employed purely for its spectacle value. It should rather be used as a means to articulate relevant ideas about the abuse of power relations, gender issues and topological social-political debates. Aesthetic transgression challenges viewers to think critically about the spectacle with which they are presented.

My own practice benefited from this research in the way in which I started to articulate some of the concerns that I intuitively pursued in my art making. Through investigating representations of excess in *Golgotha* and *Experimentet*, and through creating a theoretical framework in which to situate such an investigation, I started to visualise and understand my own art practice more clearly. The intention with the production of my work was not to create clear and overt references to some of the theories outlined in this thesis, but rather to allow these theories to influence the way I engaged with the media of collage and soft sculpture. Through creating the artworks for the exhibition *Excess Becoming Flesh*, I found that representations of excess manifest in a conceptual impulse, rather than in an overtly visual manner. The engagement with the theme of excess in relation to the body in my own practice revealed that excess can be embedded in material, process and intention, rather than being purely illustrative.

This thesis acknowledges the phenomenon of representations of excess in contemporary visual art. Through a discussion of Cohen's *Golgotha*, Djurberg's *Experimentet* and my artworks in *Excess Becoming Flesh*, I have attempted to

articulate a poetic and complex current engagement with the theme of excess in relation to the body in visual art. Through a theoretically informed analysis of these artworks, I contend that this phenomenon of excess in relation to the body has recently gained momentum and potency in ways that are not necessarily overtly political, but rather poetic and ambiguous regarding its conceptual intent.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

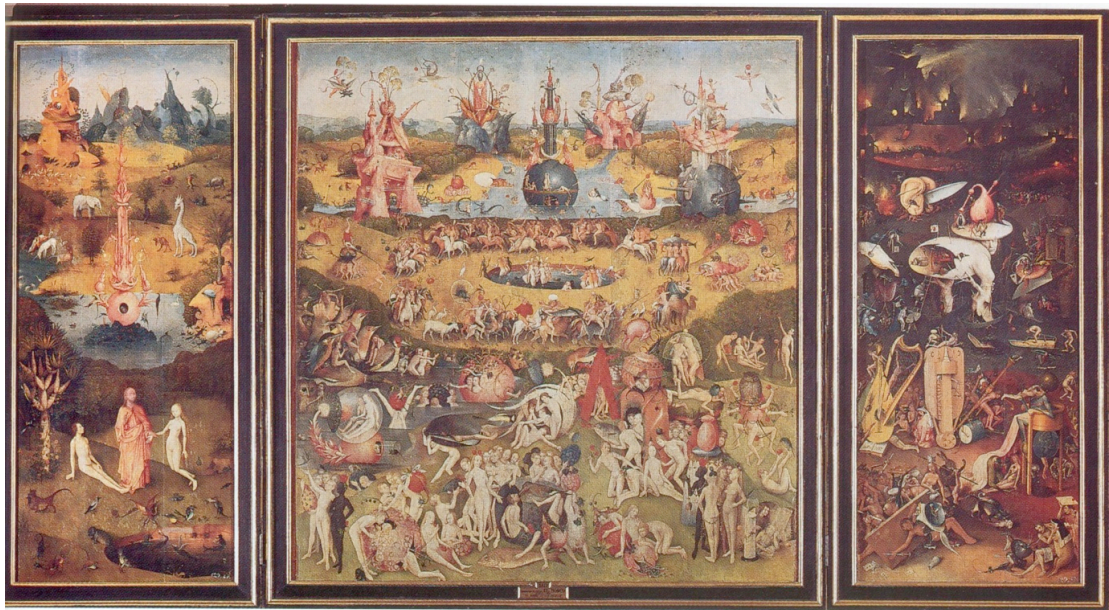


Fig 1. Hieronymus Bosch, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, Central panel of triptych. 1490-1510. Oil on panel. 220 x 389 cm.



Fig 2. Francisco Goya, *Disasters of War* #39, *Heroic Feat! Against the Dead!*. 1812-14. Etching. 15.7 x 20.7cm.



Fig 3. Chris Burden, *Shoot*. 1971. Performance.

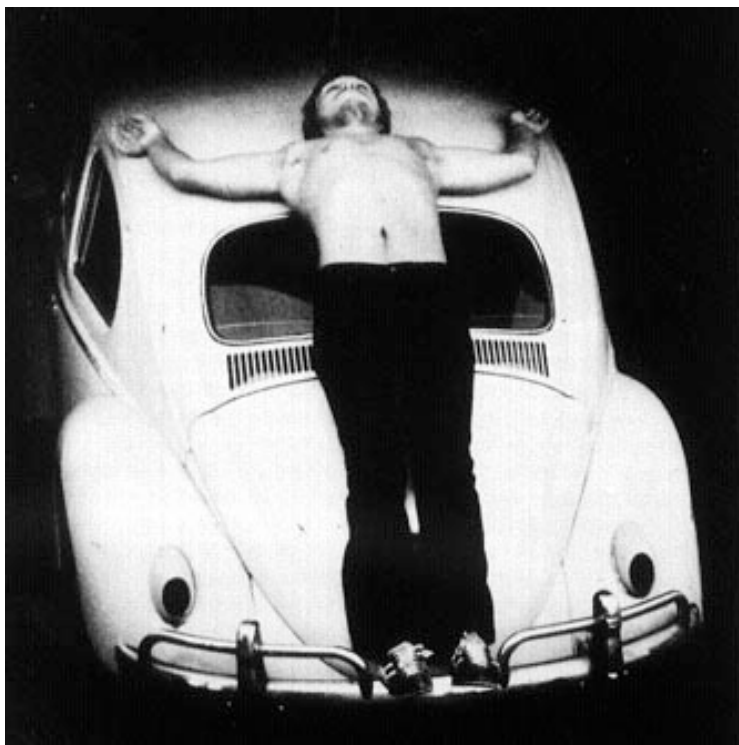


Fig 4. Chris Burden, *Transfixed*. 1974. Performance.



Fig 5. Carolee Schneemann, *Meat Joy*. 1964. Group performance with raw fish, chickens, sausages, wet paint, plastic, rope, shredded scrap paper at Judson Church, NYC.



Fig 6. Carolee Schneemann, *Meat Joy*. 1964. Video screen grab of performance.



Fig 7. Penny Siopis, *Melancholia*. 1986. Oil on canvas. 197.5 x 175.5 cm.



Fig 8. Nathalie Djurberg, *Experimentet*. 2009. Installation view at the 53rd Venice Biennale.



Fig 9. Nathalie Djurberg, *Experimentet*. 2009. Installation view at the 53rd Venice Biennale.



Fig 10. Nathalie Djurberg, *Experimentet*. 2009. Installation view at the 53rd Venice Biennale.



Fig 11. Nathalie Djurberg, *Experimentet*. 2009. Installation view at the 53rd Venice Biennale.



Fig 12. Nathalie Djurberg, *Experimentet*. 2009. Installation view at the 53rd Venice Biennale.



Fig 13. Nathalie Djurberg, Still from *Experimentet - Greed*. 2009. Clay animation, digital video. Duration: 10 min 45 sec.



Fig 14. Nathalie Djurberg, Still from *Experimentet - Forest*. 2009. Clay animation, digital video. Duration: 7 min 27 sec.



Fig 15. Nathalie Djurberg, Still from *Experimentet - Cave*. 2009. Clay animation, digital video. Duration: 6 min 39 sec.



Fig 16. Steven Cohen, *Cleaning Time (Vienna)*...*a shandeh und a chapeh (a shame and disgrace)*. 2007. Performance: Three interventions on DVD.



Fig 17. Steven Cohen, *Golgotha – Portrait #2*. 2009. C-print. Photo: Marianne Greber/VBK Wien.



Fig 18. Steven Cohen, Various stills from *Golgotha*. Single-channel HD video. Duration: 20 min 8 sec.



Fig 19. Steven Cohen, Still from *Golgotha*. Single-channel HD video. Duration: 20 min 8 sec.



Fig 20. Steven Cohen, *Golgotha, New York*. 2007. Photo: Marianne Greber.



Fig 21. Steven Cohen, *Golgotha, New York*. 2007. Photo: Marianne Greber.



Fig 22. Steven Cohen, *Golgotha – Ground Zero #1*. 2009. C-print. Photo: Marianne Greber/VBK Wien.



Fig 23. Steven Cohen, Still from *Golgotha*. Single-channel HD video. Duration: 20 min 8 sec.



Fig 24. Larita Engelbrecht. *Saturated Spectacle (After Hieronymus Bosch)*. 2011. Collage. 124 x 140 cm.



Fig 25. Nathalie Djurberg, Still from *Experimentet - Greed*. 2009. Clay animation, digital video. Duration: 10 min 45 sec.



Fig 26. Nathalie Djurberg, Still from *Experimentet - Cave*. 2009. Clay animation, digital video. Duration: 6 min 39 sec.



Fig 27. Nathalie Djurberg, Still from *Experimentet - Cave*. 2009. Clay animation, digital video. Duration: 6 min 39 sec.



Fig 28. Nathalie Djurberg, Still from *Experimentet - Cave*. 2009. Clay animation, digital video. Duration: 6 min 39 sec.



Fig 29. Nathalie Djurberg, Still from *Experimentet - Cave*. 2009. Clay animation, digital video. Duration: 6 min 39 sec.



Fig 30. Nathalie Djurberg, Still from *Experimentet - Greed*. 2009. Clay animation, digital video. Duration: 10 min 45 sec.



Fig 31. Nathalie Djurberg, Still from *Experimentet - Cave*. 2009. Clay animation, digital video. Duration: 6 min 39 sec.



Fig 32. Steven Cohen, *Golgotha – Portrait #1*. 2009. C-print. Photo: Marianne Greber/VBK Wien.



Fig 33. Steven Cohen, *Golgotha*, Studio. 2007. Photo: Marianne Greber.



Fig 34. Steven Cohen, Still from *Golgotha*. Single-channel HD video. Duration: 20 min 8 sec.



Fig 35. Steven Cohen, Still from *Golgotha*. Single-channel HD video. Duration: 20 min 8 sec.



Fig 36. Steven Cohen, *Golgotha – Dead Man Dancing #1*. 2007. C-print. Photo: Marianne Greber/VBK Wien.



Fig 37. Steven Cohen, Still from *Golgotha*. 2007-9. Single-channel HD video. Duration: 20 min 8 sec.



Fig 38. Steven Cohen, *Golgotha #1*. 2007. Photo: Marianne Greber.



Fig 39. Hans Holbein, *The Ambassadors*. 1533. Oil on oak. 207 cm × 209.5 cm.

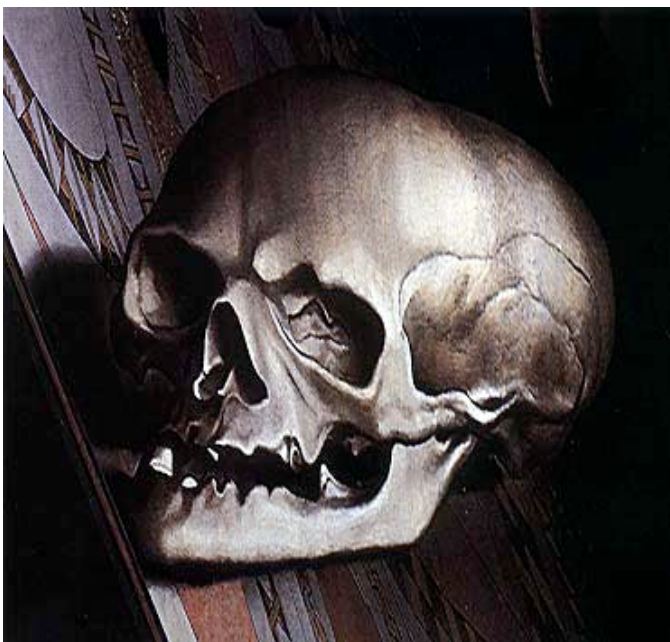


Figure 40: Hans Holbein, Detail from *The Ambassadors*. 1533. Oil on oak.



Fig 41. Damien Hirst, *For the Love of God*. 2007. Platinum, diamonds and human teeth.

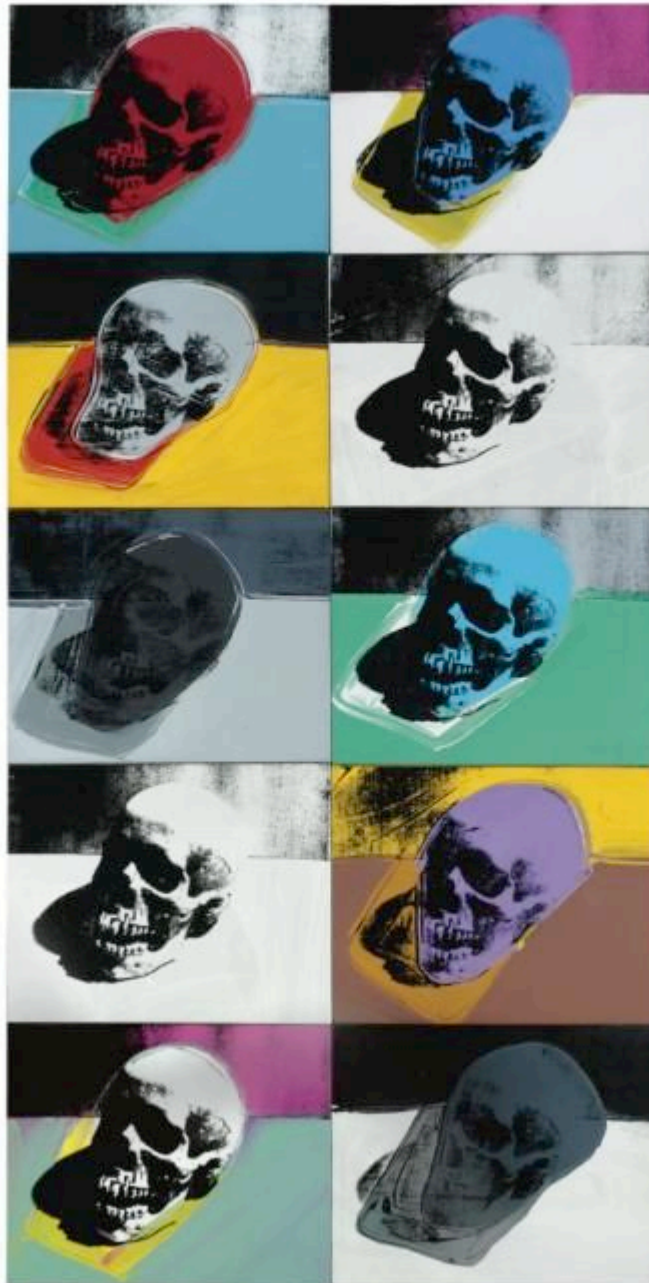


Fig 42. Andy Warhol, *Skulls*. 1976. Silkscreen print. 192.4 x 96.5 cm.



Fig 43. Vincent van Gogh, *A Pair of Boots*. 1887. Oil on Canvas. 37.5 x 45 cm.

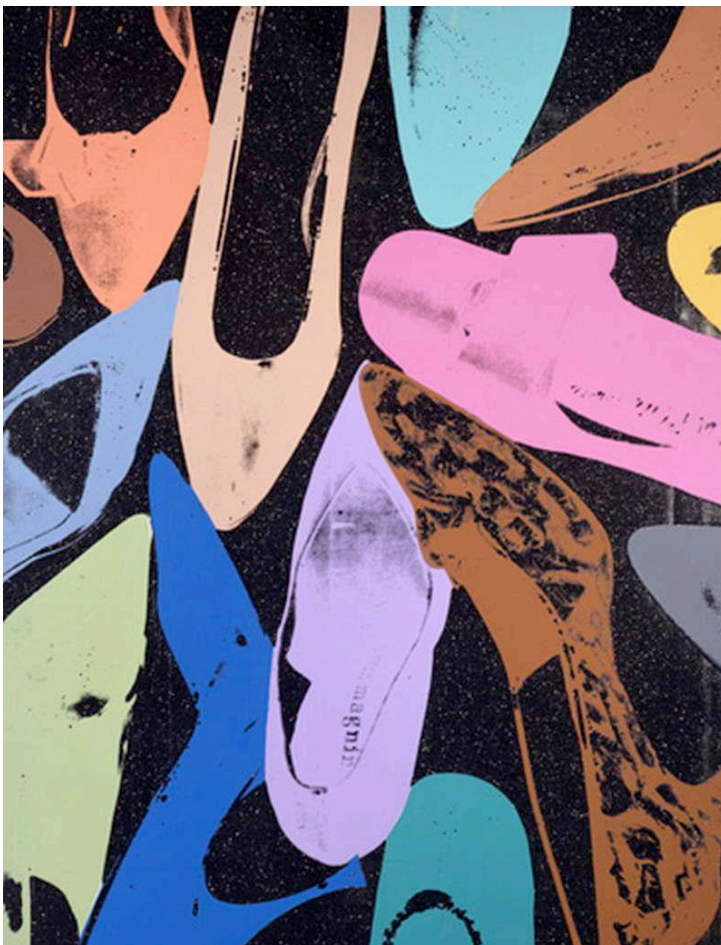


Fig 44. Andy Warhol, *Diamond Dust Shoes*. 1980. Acrylic, silkscreen ink, and diamond dust on linen. 228.6 x 177.8 cm.



Fig 45. Steven Cohen, Still from *Golgotha*. Single-channel HD video. Duration: 20 min 8 sec.



Fig 46. Nathalie Djurberg, Still from *Experimentet - Greed*. 2009. Clay animation, digital video. Duration: 10 min 45 sec.



Fig 47. Nathalie Djurberg, Still from *Experimentet - Greed*. 2009. Clay animation, digital video. Duration: 10 min 45 sec.



Fig 48. Nathalie Djurberg, Still from *Experimentet - Greed*. 2009. Clay animation, digital video. Duration: 10 min 45 sec.



Fig 49. Nathalie Djurberg, Still from *Experimentet - Greed*. 2009. Clay animation, digital video. Duration: 10 min 45 sec.



Fig 50. Nathalie Djurberg, Still from *Experimentet - Greed*. 2009. Clay animation, digital video. Duration: 10 min 45 sec.



Fig 51. Nathalie Djurberg, Still from *Experimentet - Greed*. 2009. Clay animation, digital video. Duration: 10 min 45 sec.



Fig 52. Nathalie Djurberg. Still from *Experimentet - Greed*. 2009. Clay animation, digital video. Duration: 10 min 45 sec.



Fig 53. Nathalie Djurberg, Still from *Experimentet - Forest*. 2009. Clay animation, digital video. Duration: 7 min 27 sec.



Fig 54. Nathalie Djurberg, Still from *Experimentet - Forest*. 2009. Clay animation, digital video. Duration: 7 min 27 sec.



Fig 55. Nathalie Djurberg, Still from *Experimentet - Forest*. 2009. Clay animation, digital video. Duration: 7 min 27 sec.



Fig 56. Andres Serrano, *Morgue (Knifed to Death III)*. 1992. Cibachrome, silicone, plexi-glass, wood frame, 49 1/2" x 60".



Fig 57. Larita Engelbrecht, Detail from *Saturated Spectacle (After Hieronymus Bosch)*. 2011. Collage.



Fig 58. Hieronymus Bosch, Detail from *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, Central panel of triptych. 1490-1510. Oil on panel.



Fig 59. Larita Engelbrecht, Detail from *Saturated Spectacle (After Hieronymus Bosch)*. 2011. Collage.

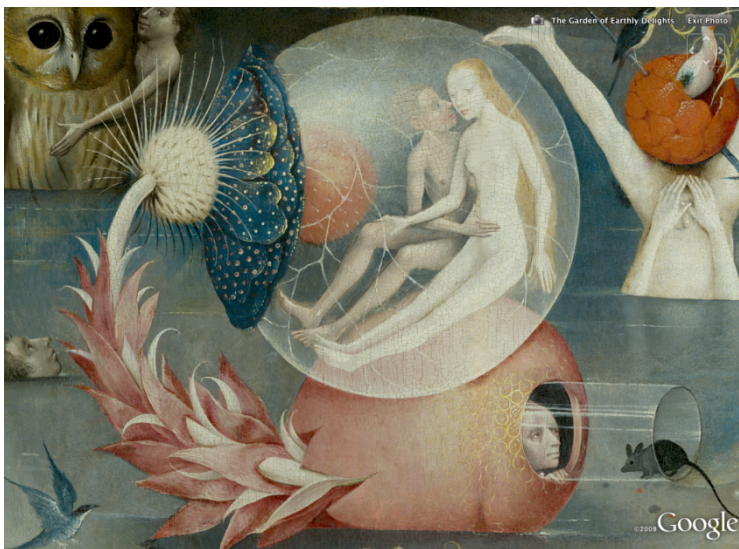


Fig 60. Hieronymus Bosch, Detail from *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, Central panel of triptych. 1490-1510. Oil on panel.



Fig 61. Larita Engelbrecht, Detail from *Saturated Spectacle (After Hieronymus Bosch)*. 2011. Collage.



Fig 62. Hieronymus Bosch, Detail from *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, Central panel of triptych. 1490-1510. Oil on panel.



Fig 63. Larita Engelbrecht, Detail of *Saturated Spectacle (After Hieronymus Bosch)*. 2011. Collage.



Fig 64. Larita Engelbrecht, Detail of *Saturated Spectacle (After Hieronymus Bosch)*. 2011. Collage.



Fig 65. Larita Engelbrecht, Detail of *Saturated Spectacle (After Hieronymus Bosch)*. 2011. Collage.

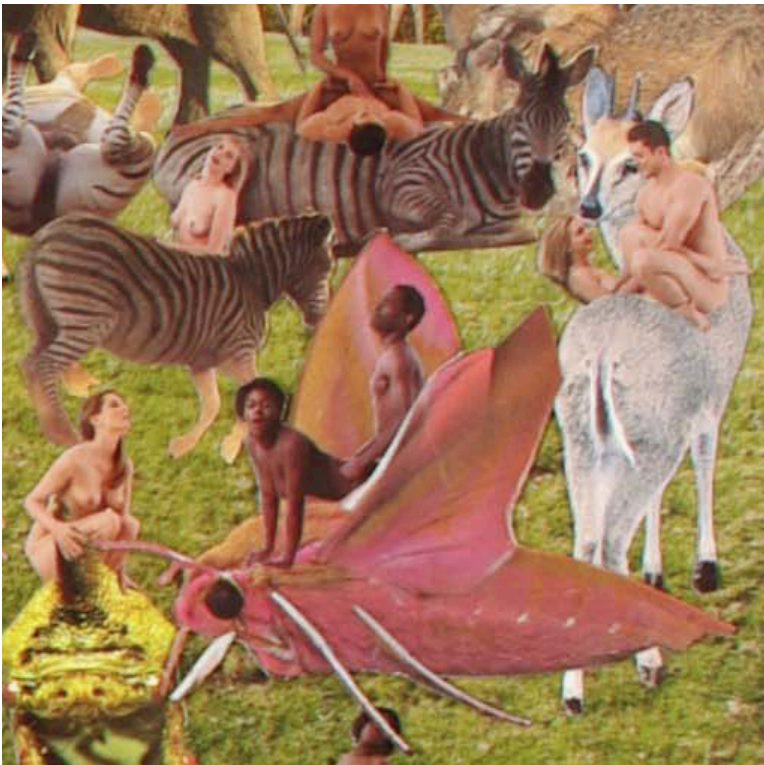


Fig 66. Larita Engelbrecht, Detail of *Saturated Spectacle (After Hieronymus Bosch)*. 2011. Collage.

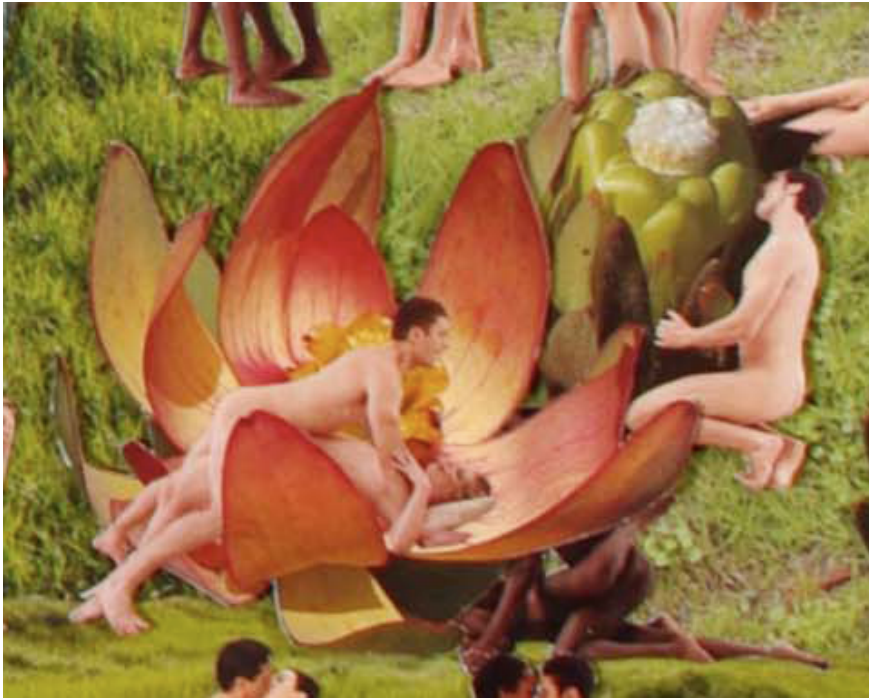


Fig 67. Larita Engelbrecht, Detail of *Saturated Spectacle (After Hieronymus Bosch)*. 2011. Collage.



Fig 68. Larita Engelbrecht, *Womb / Wound*. 2011. Felted karakul wool and merino wool, enamel paint. 75cm x 42cm x 45cm.



Fig 69. Larita Engelbrecht, *Scar*. 2011. Felted karakul wool and merino wool, enamel paint. 114cm x 28cm x 10cm.

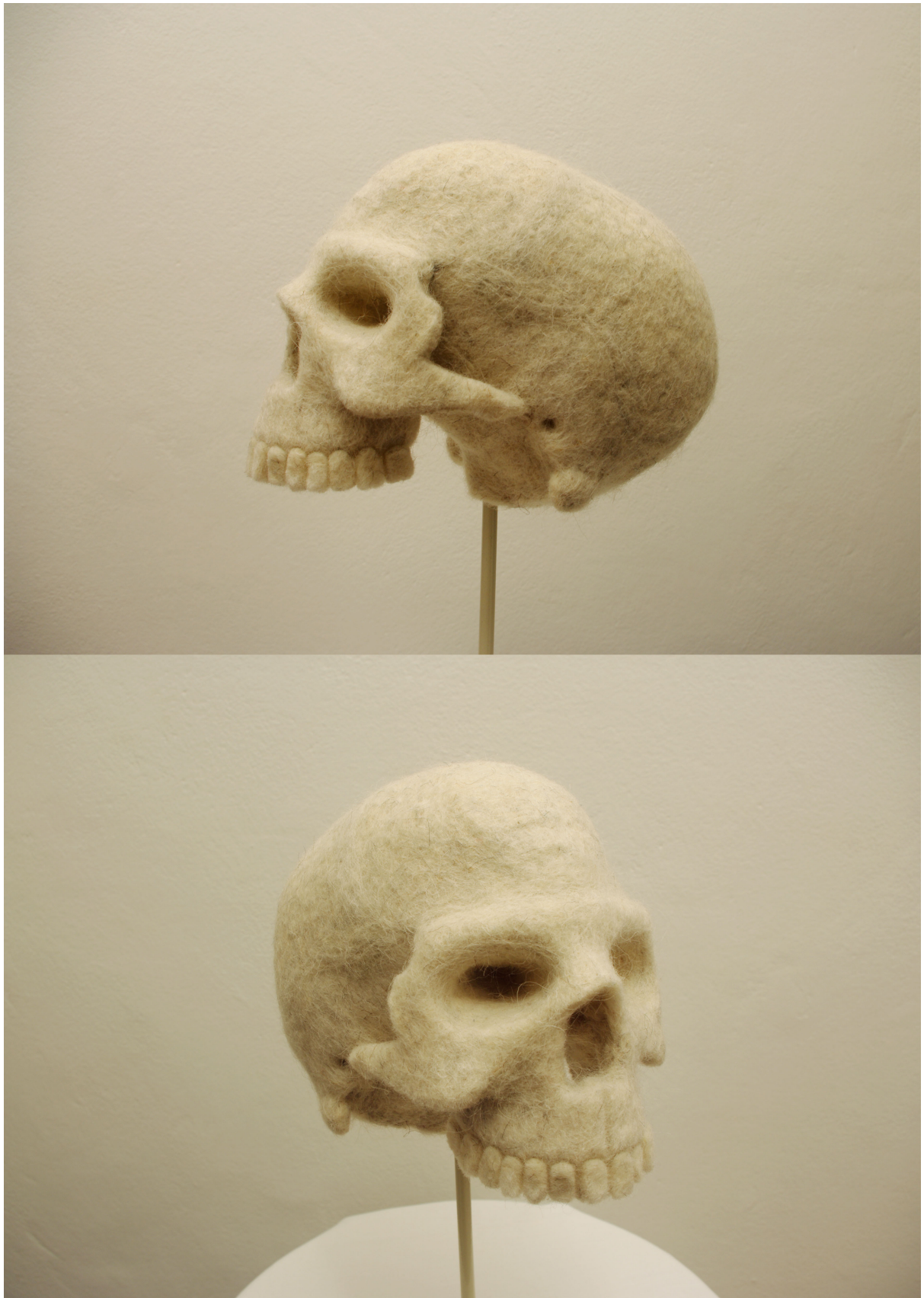


Fig 70. Larita Engelbrecht, *Memento Mori I*. 2011. Felted karakul wool. 20cm x 17cm x 25cm.