Stony Brook University

OFFICIAL COPY

The official electronic file of this thesis or dissertation is maintained by the University Libraries on behalf of The Graduate School at Stony Brook University.

© All Rights Reserved by Author.

Against an Age of Legibility:

Reading, Vision, and Embodiment in Twentieth-Century American Literature

A Dissertation Presented

by

Amy Elizabeth Falvey

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

Stony Brook University

May 2011

Copyright by
Amy Elizabeth Falvey
2011

Stony Brook University

The Graduate School

Amy Elizabeth Falvey

We, the dissertation committee for the above candidate for the

Doctor of Philosophy degree, hereby recommend

acceptance of this dissertation.

Ira Livingston – Dissertation Advisor

Chairperson, Humanities and Media Department, Pratt Institute

Jeffrey Santa Ana – Chairperson of Defense and Co-Advisor

Assistant Professor, English Department, Stony Brook University

Heidi Hutner

Associate Professor, English Department, Stony Brook University

Neda Atanasoski

Assistant Professor, Feminist Studies, University of California Santa Cruz

This dissertation is accepted by the Graduate School.

Lawrence Martin
Dean of the Graduate School

Abstract of the Dissertation

Against an Age of Legibility:

Reading, Vision, and Embodiment in Twentieth-Century American Literature

by

Amy Elizabeth Falvey

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

Stony Brook University

2011

This dissertation gathers twentieth and twenty-first century literary texts that contest conceptions of purity and readability that have dominated approaches to the body over the past century in the United States. In an age reputed to premise knowledge not on the visible – but on the genomic, the biological – the visible nonetheless remains absolute signifier of truth and knowledge. Beginning with a reading of George S. Schuyler's 1931 novel *Black No More*, I argue that a fixation on bodily and facial features as unalterable signs of otherness grew in response to the movement of bodies with both the "second wave" of immigrants into the U.S., and the migration of African Americans northward, between 1910 and 1930. Through its satire of racial purity and its revelation of mixed genealogical lines, Schuyler's text both exposes and critiques the growing desire to visually distinguish racial features, and to secure them as truth. I assert that both Schuyler's text and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* refute claims of national bodily purity and legibility, by challenging the presupposition that spaces of non-contact exist, and are – or were once – accessible. Each text that comprises this project poses a challenge to

realism and, in turn, contests the possibility of a fully coherent narrative of selfhood or embodiment, in that both texts and bodies are ongoingly in contact, and are thus both self and not-self. In *Naked Lunch*, William S. Burroughs parodies and undermines the power of the visible by making it infinitely unstable, and by presenting abjection – in both form and content – that refuses absolute readability and bodily coherency. The desire for legibility has also informed how sex and morphology are comprehended or imagined, and through Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love* and Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex*, I demonstrate that legibility is reiteratively performed in the name of creating stable signifying bodies that are never, in fact, stable. Approaching television and films that include David Cronenberg's *Videodrome*, this dissertation closes by addressing the ever-present networks of contact between bodies and "foreign" material through visual narratives that themselves question the coherency of the visible.

Illustration by Jayne Antonik

Table of Contents

Introduction 1
Legibility and Bodies Between: Always Already In-Contact

Chapter 1 34
Fictions of Purity, Fears of Illegibility, and the Face of the Nation:
Mixing Trees & Paint in Schuyler's *Black No More* and Ellison's *Invisible Man*

Chapter 2 98
Narratives of Isolation & Fleshly Commerce:
Abjection, Illegibility, Interzonality, and Contact in William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*

Chapter 3 139
Saviors and Tragic Bodies:
Disrupting Narratives of Protection in Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love* and Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex*

Chapter 4 184
Illegibility and Between-ness On Screen:
Histories of Contact in *Nip/Tuck, Videodrome,* and *XXY*

Conclusion 235
Kinect: Posthuman Bodies in Contact

Endnotes 240

References 248

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my dissertation committee for the tremendous amount of time, feedback, encouragement, and guidance they willingly dedicated to the completion of this project: Professor Ira Livingston, whose sense of humor and ability to imaginatively interrupt have been a relief and a source of inspiration; Professor Jeffrey Santa Ana, whose capacity to recommend the most relevant, compelling, and innovative theoretical texts is uncanny, and aided immeasurably in the development of this project; Professor Heidi Hutner, whose faith in me as a thinker and writer throughout my entire graduate career was a comfort; Professor Atanasoski, who introduced me to the work of Sara Ahmed, and encouraged me to pursue an intersection between visual culture and gender theories that grounded this project. I would also like to thank Professor Celia Marshik, who guided me through a number of difficulties and questions over the course of my graduate experience.

I would like to thank all the teachers whose classes, conversations, and words of wisdom brought me here. The professors I was fortunate enough to know during my undergraduate experience had an indelibly positive impact on me. A special thanks to Carl and Stella Herzig, and the Herzig family, for their spiritual support. I would also like to thank those friends whose support outside the program at Stony Brook contributed immensely to my survival within it: Sara Nylander, Alicia Giffin, Krista Thanos, and others.

I would like to thank my family for their unrelenting support in pursuit of this degree. My brothers – Shaun, Paul, Daniel, and Matthew – have continued to offer their words of encouragement and congratulations, and lent an interested ear to the sounds of this strange path. My parents – Kristina and John – deserve an unending hymn of praise. My dad always said that his dream was to help his children live out their dreams. Without the support of my parents, my completion of this dissertation would not have been possible, and I cannot thank them enough. Their pride in me is humbling, and their love and faith in me outstanding.

Finally, I would like to thank the four people whose presence at Stony Brook was essential to my eventual completion of the dissertation, as well as my growth as one who thinks, writes, critiques: Eileen Chanza Torres, from whom I learned so much that words simply cannot express it; Rachel Neyra Ellis, whose musical abilities in both sound and word have so many moments struck me with an indescribable beauty; Emily Churilla, whose sarcasm served as my salvation so many times; and last, but hardly least, Jacqueline Vigliotti (Standardotti), my eternal sage.

Introduction
Legibility and Bodies Between: Always Already In-Contact

…how might we encounter the difference that calls our grids of intelligibility into question without trying to foreclose the challenge that the difference delivers? What might it mean to learn to live in the anxiety of that challenge, to feel the surety of one's epistemological and ontological anchor go, but to be willing, in the name of the human, to allow the human to become something other than what it is traditionally assumed to be? This means that we must learn to live and to embrace the destruction and rearticulation of the human in the name of a more capacious and, finally, less violent world, not knowing in advance what precise form our humanness does and will take. It means we must be open to its permutations, in the name of nonviolence.

-Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 35

Deceptive, Readable Bodies

This project gathers twentieth and twenty-first century literary texts that contest conceptions of purity and readability that have dominated approaches to the body over the past century in the United States. In an age reputed to premise knowledge not on the visible – but on the genomic, the biological – the visible nonetheless remains absolute signifier of truth and knowledge. This project suggests that dramatic alterations undergone in the United States in the beginning of the twentieth century brought with them public, national, and institutional imaginings of otherness that centered on the reading of bodies and faces. Over the course of the century, this project maintains, the desire for – and belief in – the ultimate legibility of difference has continued its hold over the nation. Shifts in science and medicine at the turn of the century reflected and contributed to a growing focus on the visible as locus of truth. The changes developing in these fields cultivated a philosophy of the visible contending that, while the surface or appearance of a body or object *may deceive* or *be deceptive*, the truth of a body, a face, or an object could be – and should rightly be – detected and read with the implementation of a scrutinizing look.

In 1911, scientist Wilhelm Johannsen delineated between the genotype and phenotype of an organism, suggesting that the phenotype was the visible expression of genetic makeup. Differentiating between internal and external, and maintaining that the two were not commensurate, Johannsen's work sparked a series of debates between contemporaries George Shull and O.F. Cook in several 1912 issues of *Science*. Debating what precisely Johannsen meant by the term "phenotype," the scientists reveal an undercurrent of the industry at the time: the desperate desire to read surfaces as truths. In discussing phenotypes, Shull writes that, "It would be quite impossible to know for a certainty that two twigs used as cuttings or cions from the same tree had the same genotypic constitution" (183). The example used by Shull is particularly apt in conjunction with the first chapter of this project, which focuses on the family tree as the destination set by a search for pure origins – or, if read with resistance, a site that reveals mixing and contact between bodies. In concert with growing cultural uneasiness about the contamination and infiltration of a nation whose bodily contours were undergoing drastic changes, white American citizens began to fear that mixing would lead to bodies and faces whose lineages were both impure and unreadable (and assumed, therefore, a prior point of purity and readability – a stage in which mixing was not already ongoing). Early writings about the genotype and phenotype reveal a similarly strained relation to the visible. As the undertones of Shull's tree limbs imply, the concern over the readable (the internal manifest reliably in the external, thus revealing legibly that internal composition) emerges.

In Cook's response to Shull's reading of the "phenotype," he incorporates a translation of Johannsen's work. The "type," according to Johannsen, "is a merely superficial appearance which may be deceptive; only through further investigation can it be determined whether one or many biologically different types are present" (655). The powerful correlation between

Johannsen's assertion and the philosophy of difference that manifest itself at this time demonstrates a fixation on legibility that permeated the national imagination in this era. According to Johannsen and his contemporaries, while appearance itself may initially deceive, the essence of a thing is ultimately readable upon further, closer, visual investigation. This philosophy is one that has continued to dominate the past century in the United States: one is to be cautious of the visible, since otherness may disguise itself and lurk beneath the surface; yet, ultimately, that surface is readable and decipherable – the disguise to be seen through – upon a concentrated act of looking. The paradoxical nature of this philosophy can be seen even in the excerpt from Johannsen: "The word phenotype serves only to make the necessary mental reservation that from the appearance alone no further conclusion can be drawn," while simultaneously, "phenotypes are in themselves measurable realities" (655). Thus, the visible does not *guarantee or grant knowledge*, but at the same time, offers a *measurable reality*, a calculable truth or knowledge. Difference may not be immediately apparent, but it is ultimately statistically and measurably readable. Again, this approach to difference and otherness has continued to permeate the national imaginary over the course of the past century.

At the turn of the century, between 1903 and 1904, developments in X-Ray technologies promulgated experiments, and rumors of experiments, in turning black skin white. Although this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 1, fears about the presence or absence of visible signs of difference corresponded with a technology that, like the description of the phenotype that followed on its heels, promised an ultimate readable truth. Caroline Thomas De la Peña notes, ". . . that X rays were unsettling racial divisions previously 'proven' by science, can be understood by contextualizing the rays within a culture that regarded them as revealers of essential truths. In his work on early X-ray use in American hospitals, Howell has argued that

during the early twentieth century Americans perceived X-rays to be uniquely able to 'pierce through the artificial, false exterior' of things and 'discern the reality beneath.'" (40). The philosophies that underlie both the phenotype and the X-Ray, then, share similarities in that both generate a deceptive surface that can eventually be decoded, with the proper visual investigation. The surface must be breached to access another, readable (even if internal) surface.

The primacy of the visible as marker of truth has continued, into the present, to dominate how race, sex, morphology, and embodiment are imagined. As Katrina Karkazis notes in a discussion of infants born intersexed – a focus of Chapter 3 in this project – the reliance on the visible as teller of truth has remained a distinct emphasis in the social response to genital "ambiguity": "The diagnosis and treatment of intersexuality are characterized by what Suzanne Kessler has called 'lookism': treatment focused primarily on the body's exterior and meant to give patients a visually coherent gender" (289). Over a century of tracing the chromosomal, social, cultural, and genetic influence that might statistically render ambiguous sex "unambiguous" or "readable," the medical industry (and the public) continues to regard the main determinant of sex (and the possibility of sexual pleasure) as the appearance of the genitalia itself.

Likewise, visual distinction and distinguishability have continued to operate as a system of delineating racial difference. Lisa Nakamura notes that, "the 'truth' about race is not a visual truth, yet it is one that is persistently envisioned that way" (81). Analyzing the website "alllooksame.com," Nakamura suggests instead that the site, which encourages users – who must respond with the "familiar iconography of a Scantron exam" (78) – to identify whether select photographs feature people of Chinese, Japanese, or Korean descent. While acknowledging claims that the website is racist, Nakamura suggests that the site, developed by Dyske Suematsu,

actually challenges viewers – especially those of Asian descent, who claim the capacity to visually determine differences between Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans – to rethink positions about the readability of race or difference. Nakamura claims that the website,

> is an apparatus that deconstructs the visual culture of race. The confusion this entails – users seem to be radically divided as to what the site signifies – provides a unique intervention into the ways that the visual participates in taxonomies of race. The most challenging aspect of this, an aspect that is specifically enabled by the site's interactivity, is that the user is forced to confront her inadequacy in the face of visual 'evidence' of race. (81)

Nakamura argues that the website works to deconstruct notions of legibility that, as she points out, continue to permeate the way we envision and understand race and racial difference. This project carries a similar trajectory, in that it aims to re-vision how we see others, how we "read" bodies and texts, how we understand difference, and – perhaps most significantly – how we comprehend embodiment in relationship to those re-visionings. It challenges those assertions that the truth of sex, gender, race, or embodiment can be deciphered through a thorough visual investigation.

Narratives of Legibility: Purity, Isolation, and Protection in Embodiment

The chapters of this project focus on notions of purity, isolation, and protection – predominantly because these have been the main concepts undergirding a turn to the visual or visible as locus of truth, and have acted as a force behind a belief in the ultimate readability of difference. Although this project approaches the terms purity, isolation, and protection independently, it also assumes them to be interrelated to the construction of legible difference over the course of the past century; this project likewise assumes that these terms are deployed

collectively in that continued construction. Purity relates to a belief in readable difference, and couples with the concept of isolation, as it is the underlying mythology of singularity of embodiment, selfhood, race, and sex. According to narratives of purity, both individual and national bodies were once pure, readable entities. The growing presence of non-white populations in the U.S., within this narrative, threatens to contaminate a once-pure (and once-legible) entity; similarly, non-white bodies threaten to infiltrate supposedly pure white genealogical lineages. Narratives of isolation similarly imagine a once pure and singular entity of the past, and assert that all bodies (again, individual as well as national) are essentially extricatable from one another – that a prior point of non-contact between a "self" and its "others" existed. As with imaginings of a once-pure entity, fantasies of a once-isolatable body also insist on a once-readable entity, whose coherency and readability degenerate and face dissolution with the presence of infringing "others." Narratives of protection, I argue, work in concert with both purity and isolation, and call for the protection of that supposedly infringed, degenerating, and dissipating (presumed once-coherent and readable) entity.

Each of these narratives is challenged in this project through the reading of interruptive texts that, interwoven together, propose a re-conceiving of reading, vision, and embodiment. In many ways, embodiment lies at the heart of these three terms, because it is with a resistant understanding of embodiment that we might begin to comprehend the (im)possibility of reading difference and the (il)legibility afforded by the visible. At the core of this project is *the relationship between embodiment and contact* and, in turn, *the betweenness of all embodiment*. If embodiment (and selfhood) were understood not to be pure and isolated, but to be tentative and ongoingly in transformation because of inevitable contact with "outside" entities or

"foreign" agents, the idea of difference as essentially a readable entity divulging an ultimate truth can be deconstructed as a false and often violent precept.

Infringing "Others" and Legibility

On Talk Radio Network's *The Savage Nation* in 2008, Michael Savage lamented the statistical decline of a white majority in the United States, stating that, "America is being overrun by an invasion force from Mexico that'll soon take over the country [. . .] And minorities in America are becoming the majority."[1] Savage articulates a threat of submersion, concern with a minority overtaking the (implicitly white) majority in the United States. Expressing the impending threat of disintegration over a presumedly once-coherent, and once readable entity, Savage proceeds by articulating this fear of submersion specifically through a focus on the face, and the "face of the nation": "If you look at the countries around the world where most of these immigrants have come from, you will see autocratic regimes, you will see drug dealers running the nation, you will see people living like serfs, and you will see the future face of America." The (sur)face of the nation is threatened by contact with these "others"; and their faces signify degeneration and primitivism, as well as a dissolving once-coherent (and once legible) face and body of the nation.

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed presents an excerpt from the Aryan Nations' Website, which claims that disgust, for example, with looking on mixed-raced couples, or frustrations with immigrants getting jobs "over the white citizens who built this land," is not out of hate: "No, it is not hate. It is Love" (42). The language of the Aryan Nations' Website is strikingly similar to the rhetorical framework Savage utilizes; Savage asks, "Is it racist to love your nation? Is it racist to protect your nation? Is it racist to protect your nation against an invading horde, from another nation that wants to sweep you off the map?" Like the language

analyzed by Ahmed, Savage generates a pure and holistic subject, and makes a (false) claim to ownership over what America is (white) and who is being violated by whom (disavowing his own privileged position, as white male American citizen) by suggesting that it is actually he who suffers a threat, victimhood; something is being taken from him which presumably belongs to him (and others like him – non-immigrants, that is, or simply non-whites), and it is he who experiences violation, he who is under threat. It is significant to note that, again, this falls into the visual registers by which such threats are continually constructed. Savage turns to the map, and the impending disappearance of "America" or what it once was. In order for this construction to work, there must be a denial of contact, there must exist some prior space of non-contact, and some *a priori* identity of "America" outside of its connections with "others." Savage refuses to acknowledge the histories of contact that have, and do, go into the making of maps. There are no histories of contact that go into the shaping of those surfaces. For Savage, there were, or are, never any cartographers – what is and who is the "United States" pre-existed the work of politics and governments, laws and language, colonization and cartography, and the contacts therein which have effected how maps take shape. This project is invested in such forms of contact, especially when those forms of contact remain invisible.

Responding to, and reiterating, fears of a growing incoherence resulting from the heterogeneity of the U.S. national body (dissolving or submerging a supposedly once-legible national face and body), the 1993 special issue of *Time* presented readers with "The New Face of America" – a computer-generated face composed of a digitalized mixing of races that bred the "new face," which Donna Haraway has called "SimEve" (278). Subject of much discussion, this *Time* issue aimed to address a statistical decline of white Americans as the majority population in the United States: "sometime during the second half of the 21st century the descendents of white

Europeans, the arbiters of the core national culture for most of its existence, are likely to slip into minority status." What is evidenced most, I believe, in *Time's* "new face of America," is that it responds to fears of submersion that continue to be centered, obsessively, on the face and its features. There is a way in which this issue attempts to both provoke and to assuage fears over a growing or an impending dissipation of a once-legible body. As such, the magazine issue itself both acts and reacts in the context of a perpetuated fiction of once-pure, and legible, body and face – "others" threaten to make the pure white face of America illegible, unreadable. Lauren Berlant writes of the *Time* image, and suggests that a

> panic of mistrust in the viability of a non-European-dominated 'America' almost goes without saying in any contemporary mainstream discussion of the immigrant effect: it is expressed in the chain of almost equivalent signs 'immigrant,' 'alien,' 'minority,' 'illegal,'; it is expressed in the ordinary phrase 'wave of immigrants,' which never quite explicitly details the specter of erosion and drowning it contains, a specter that has long haunted American concerns about the solidarity of national economic and cultural property. (197)

The *Time* issue demonstrates how fears of immigration, and fears of a supposedly pure white body becoming illegible, are directly connected to the appearance of the face of the nation and the national body. The corruption and degradation that occurs with the proximity or presence of these "others" – and the altering contours of the "face of the nation" that come with such proximity or presence – threatens the distinguishable, readable, and white surface that Michael Savage, for example, portends to exist.

Shawn Michelle Smith suggests that *Time* premises its image on a national imagination that still insists on pure racial bloodlines and distinguishable racial features. In listing off the

precise percentages of racial heritage combined in order to create the future face of America, the ideology behind the assembly of this image insists not only on lines of distinguishability and readability that derive their supposed coherency from monolithic conceptions of race, but also maintains an obsession with tracing clean and straight lines of origin. Smith writes that,

> *Time*'s visual grid works on the assumptions that racial 'types' can be measured and itemized mathematically, divided into fractions, and combined with other racial components [...] always the sum of statistically equivalent pieces. Thus, while racial and ethnic groups may mix in a multi-cultural American nation at the turn of a new century, one can see that the 'type' remains (at least ideologically) discrete. In other words, a code of visual distinctions remains intact, if ever more meticulously codified, even as racial mixture is imagined. In short, multicultural identity is configured as the sum of 'separate but equal' parts. (78-80)

The digital image of the supposed multicultural future face of the nation relies on the continued construction of purity. While the image might be an amalgamation, it is still a mappable body and face. Its statistical composition suggests that there is nothing messy, nothing convoluted in the drawing of lines. The image still remains the product of a national imaginary that understands the body to be ultimately readable and knowable in totality. While the image speaks to the supposed impending threat of the loss of a presumed once-coherent whiteness, it also works to mollify that threat because, despite the prospect of mixing, the listing of calculated proportions still takes as its base the fundamental possibility of legibility and distinction. Contact is not always already ongoing in such a construction, because the apparent heterogeneity of this "future face" only emerges through the mathematical equation of once-pure and once-untouched racial lineage. And the body remains always already chartable – each percentage

written on the body, and made available for the reader. Smith points out that visual distinctions remain intact; the fear of illegibility is both presented and overcome. As with the deceptive appearance – the phenotype – the face of difference may be deceptive, but ultimately (upon thorough visual investigation) can be made intelligible.

While imaginings of a once-intact national body are a focus of this project, it is important to emphasize that this project is equally invested in how the individual body is constructed, imagined, or understood. The arguments about both individual and national bodies, however, are extraordinarily interrelated – even parallel – as I approach them in this project. Like the once-coherent and isolatable entity conceived in the previous depictions of the nation or national body, the individual body is predominantly understood as inherently singular, and essentially an extricatable entity that once existed in a prior space of non-contact between the self or the body and "outside" or "foreign" agents. Each chapter assumes a connection between how we understand these different forms of bodily constitution and coherency, and argues for an interimplicating understanding of both. It is of urgent importance that we re-conceive of each, though it may be through a fundamentally different comprehension of individual embodiment – as always already in contact – that we might begin to resistantly conceive of the nation as always already in contact with its "others," thus destroying the claim to protection that often justifies extraordinarily violent and coercive responses to difference.

The Space Between/Seeing Invisible

There most certainly exists a "space between" the self and its "others." Yet that space between is not empty, a gap of nothingness that leaves a gulf of separation between bodies, objects, the world. The space between exists always already in fullness, dense with material, and because that space is full – and not empty – this means that bodies, objects, and the world, are

always already in contact with one another. Proposing that we understand bodies and space in this way does not mean that "the Other" becomes merely an extension of the self, or vice versa; instead, it means that bodies are all connected, through contact, to one another. With this comes the capacity to love through touch, to care for and to caress through touch. Yet with this also comes vulnerability, exploitation, and violence. In part, exploitation and violence can proceed from an erasure of the signs of that contact, or through narratives which continue to insist on the possibility of transcendence – on the possibility of being disconnected, or entirely alienated, from "others." Such fictions depend upon the articulation of a stable self, a stable other, and an abyss that demarcates their edges with finality and precision, with a disacknowledgment of the always ongoing contact.

In "The Look of Love," Kelly Oliver works to re-conceive of vision, especially as it pertains to otherness, and argues that "the *between* is missing from dominant conceptions of vision" (65). She traces these dominant conceptions as descending predominantly from the work of Lacan and Sartre, and works to both critique and intervene in that space of betweenness absent from their theories of vision. Oliver suggests that in the work of Lacan and Sartre, vision can only be an annihilative force. She states that in Lacan's theory of the mirror stage,

> vision is imagined as a sense that inaugurates an abyss, which is in fact created by the faulty presupposition that vision traverses empty space. Space, after all, is not empty and there is no physical gap between the infant and his mirror image. The infant, the mirror, and his image inhabit the same world of air, light, heat, and the continual movement of matter that keeps them in constant connection. (59)

Oliver calls for the acknowledgement of the materiality of this betweenness, and contends that such annihilative conceptions of vision and otherness presuppose that this materiality is in fact

nothingness, emptiness. She also asks us to see the contact that always already occurs between bodies, even if and when – or especially if and when – there are no visible threads that evidence the fabric of that contact. To acknowledge this contact is, for Oliver, "the look of love." Luce Irigaray's text *The Forgetting of Air* contributes to Oliver's understanding of the density of the spaces between one and "the Other." Irigaray focuses on the materiality of air itself:

> No gap, breach, spacing or distancing is possible between the living organism and the blood that has always already nourished it, including with oxygen. Nor is there any more of a gap between it and the ambient air it continuously breathes once born. Nor between it and milk, water, or wine, when it drinks these. No interval, no interstice, between it and that from which it derives its most originary form of subsistence. Were there in these circumstances any such distance, any void, the living organism would die. (84)

Thus there exists, for Irigaray, no empty abyss, no space between of nothingness that divides, but rather the full, thick fleshliness of air. With this acknowledgement of meaningful spaces between also emerges an interdependence. Contact with air is inevitable, as Irigaray points out, or the organism would die. Likewise, bodies enter into the world essentially vulnerable, and necessarily in contact. We are dependent on others for our subsistence at birth and through infancy.[2] Without this contact, the living organism would also expire. Our very lives are at stake in the contact we inevitably make with others. It is also because of this contact that bodies are vulnerable, exploitable – and some bodies more subject than others to that vulnerability and exploitation. That exploitation is at least partially a result of refusing to see, refusing to look at, refusing to acknowledge the not-always-visible, but always already present and ongoing, contact between self and not-self.

Oliver goes on further to suggest that a look of love "sees the invisible in the visible" (71). Recognizing the unrecognizable, the invisible, which connects bodies to one another, then, is a necessary recognition in the look of love she advocates: "We need to recognize our connection, dependence, and indebtedness to each other as individuals and as social groups. The possibility of love, then, is founded on the possibility of public space as full of the elements that connect us to each other" (75). The "between" bodies is a space which is full, not empty. Oliver suggests that in this space between – comprised of light, air, language, elements – there is always already contact between "in" and "out." When we speak of "making contact" or "coming into contact with" we presuppose that contact is not always already made, that bodies and objects are not always already coming into contact with one another. Fictions that pervade the national imaginary in the United States are premised on the assumption that there is a possibility of being "outside" of contact, of not touching what is understood to be "outside" the confines of that self, whether that self be the individual or national construction of a whole and integrated body or subjecthood. To recognize the fullness of the space between is to acknowledge that which may not or cannot *appear*, but which persists and connects bodies and objects across space, even in its invisibility. This recognition suggests that contact is always making, being made, already made; this recognition means that all bodies and objects are always already in contact with one another. Oliver calls us to recognize this, and suggests that with this acknowledgement emerges a more loving look, arguing that re-conceiving of vision in this way also re-configures touch and contact more justly and less violently. Comprehending "betweenness" as a space that connects us to others, rather than that which alienates us from others, Oliver insists, can lead to "opening a space beyond domination"(75) :

> The critical self-reflection of the loving eye is a reflection through full and not empty space, a reflection that is communicated not on the smooth, hard, resistant surface of a mirror but in the tissues of the flesh of the world. If we reconceive of recognition from a notion of vision which emphasizes the fullness of space and the connections – interdependence even – between the visible world and vision, between the seer and the seen, then we begin to move away from the Hegelian struggle for recognition and towards an acknowledgment of otherness (75).

I would like to suggest that the vision Oliver calls for is not only a look of love, but is also a particularly queer look. When Oliver suggests that the look of love "sees the invisible in the visible," she asks her readers to alter their perception, to engage the world though a lens that is not quite "straight." It is through such queer perception that we are asked to see the invisible within the visible, to recognize the thickness of air.

Why "Queer"?

In *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Sara Ahmed examines the conjunctions between the terminology of lines, directionality, orientation, and objects of perception (as well as perception itself). In examining social arrangements, paths, and how objects and others are faced, Ahmed articulates that a critical and political disorientation is a means of placing different objects, paths, and directions within view – and creates new spaces and social arrangements, paths that do not reproduce, that "fail" to reproduce the timelines, and the spatial and directional dimensions dictated by white heteronormativity. Through her argument emerges an emphasis on histories of contact and the surfaces of objects or bodies, surfaces which do not necessarily evidence or show the signs of histories of contact – but surfaces which are nonetheless shaped by that contact: "History cannot simply be perceived on

the surface of the object, even if how objects surface or take shape is an effect of such histories" (41). Ahmed suggests that Marxism allows us to trace some of those effaced signs of contact, that Marx helps us to confront the labor that is in the "background" of a commodity or an object. This grounding forms much of Ahmed's movement throughout the text, in resuscitating the labor and mixing, or contact, that do not appear but still give shape to an object or body. Ahmed's rich analysis of the labor and contact that shapes objects and bodies never explicitly focuses on an eye that "sees the invisible in the visible," while Oliver's text does not incorporate the Marxist ideologies that inform Ahmed's focus on labor in its relationship to that invisibility within the visible. Yet these texts do speak to one another, in the density of the space between them that brings each into contact. In placing these two texts into a more direct dialogue, there emerges what I call a "queer vision" – which incorporates both the "look of love" that Oliver proposes in addition to the Marxist focus on labor utilized by Ahmed. While Ahmed's arguments about perception and phenomenology are explicitly designated as "queer," Oliver's argument also, I argue, is "queer."

Ahmed begins her reflection on sexual orientation by citing Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and suggesting that in his work, *Phenomenology of Perception*, "queer moments do happen. These are moments in the text where the world no longer appears 'the right way up'" (65). Yet, in the "slantwise" vision of a subject who momentarily feels a sense of disorientation, a sense of reorientation is gained in Merleau-Ponty's work through what Ahmed describes as "the 'becoming vertical' of perspective" in which "the 'queer effect' is overcome and objects in the world no longer appear as if they are 'off center' or slantwise.'" She continues: "In other words, Merleau-Ponty considers how subjects 'straighten' any queer effects and he asks what this tendency to 'see straight' suggests about the relationship between bodies and space" (65).

Ahmed utilizes this as a point of departure, a means of reflecting on the relationship between seeing and being "straight" in the world. This is, in part, how Oliver's proposal for "the look of love" is also a queer look. Oliver asks us to "see the invisible within the visible," and thus her proposal for seeing relies on an unstraightening of sight. In calling us to see the invisible within the visible, we are asked not to "see straight" – we are asked to resist this tendency, asked to take a different turn – a more loving look. We are asked to recognize the thickness of that which does not surface, but which shapes surfaces through contact. Ahmed states that, "Queer is, after all, a spatial term" (67), and it is also in this spatiality of the term that it can be incorporated within Oliver's proposition. Oliver asks us to not only reconsider vision, but to reconsider space. To see space as full rather than empty is to queer space; it is to refuse to "straighten" it up.

As I have suggested, Ahmed's work offers a critique of labor that can contribute to Oliver's proposal for re-conceiving of space as that which connects, rather than alienates, "selves" and "others," and for comprehending the "between" as full, rather than empty. In a gesture similar to that made by Irigaray in focusing on the "forgetting of air," Ahmed also concentrates on what the philosopher has forgotten – and this too involves the forgetting of contact with particular elements that may not "appear" to the philosopher. Utilizing the appearance of the writing table in Husserl's *Ideas*, Ahmed begins by suggesting how contact informs the orientation of the philosopher: "The use of tables shows us the very orientation of philosophy in part by showing us what is proximate to the body of the philosopher, or 'what' the philosopher comes into contact 'with.'" (3). She suggests in her notes at this juncture that, "When tables appear in order to illustrate points, then they tend also to disappear as objects with their own histories" (182). Thus, Ahmed proceeds to speculate about the table – to follow it around, as she states, in order to implement what Oliver calls "the look of love." Though this

incorporation is not explicit, and Oliver does not emerge directly in Ahmed's work, *Queer Phenomenology* actually becomes an exercise in the kind of vision suggested by Oliver. We are asked to recognize the materiality of what is forgotten, or what is invisible within the visible. Ahmed writes of Husserl's writing table:

> Being oriented toward the writing table not only relegates other rooms in the house to the background, but also might depend *on the work done to keep the desk clear*. The desk that is clear is one that is ready for writing. One might even consider the domestic work that must have taken place for Husserl to turn to the writing table, and to be writing on the table, and to keep that table as the object of his attention. We can draw here on the long history of feminist scholarship about the politics of housework: about the ways in which women, as wives and servants, do the work required to keep such spaces available for men and the work they do (Gilman 2002). To sustain an orientation toward the writing table might depend on such work, while it erases the signs of that work, as signs of dependence. (30-31)

Like Irigaray's assertion that the philosopher forgets air – the matter and material of air, and as Oliver notes, the contact present therein – Ahmed suggests that the philosopher (in this case, Husserl) forgets air, in the sense that he forgets the matter of labor that allows the philosopher to do his work. Irigaray, Oliver, and Ahmed all acknowledge this forgetting of the material. Ahmed's emphasis on labor gives another dimension to the proposition of Oliver, in that she acknowledges, in addition to the air (the contact) the philosopher forgets, the material labor that also exists within the invisible, and is itself a form of contact which can be erased – or which *can*

not or does not appear on the surface. At the nexus of these theories is the place where queer vision – or queer looking – might emerge.

Illegibility and Queer Vision

Fictions that pervade the national imaginary suggest that bodies, both individual and national, are – or, many times are not, but once were – legible, readable surfaces. Within this imaginary, bodies bear the signs of their contact with others, and where there are no evidences of contact, then contact has not occurred; bodies speak of and for themselves and their contact with other bodies through a surfacing of visual cues and markers. The invisible, in the narrations of dominant fictions that promulgate such notions of bodily contact and visual evidence, bears no meaning; it is a space which is empty. Oliver poses a challenge to this notion, in that she suggests that there is contact even when that contact may not or cannot appear; and Ahmed intervenes in such an imaginary in that she suggests that histories and/of contact are not always apparent on the surfaces of objects or bodies, even though contact shapes both objects and bodies. For both Oliver and Ahmed, contact is inevitable, and also not necessarily visible. Both suggest that contact, as well as the evidence of contact, can be and often is, invisible. Thus for both Oliver and Ahmed, surfaces – that which can be seen – are not legible, because that which does not mark the surface, or that which does not itself visibly surface, holds density, contact. Contact is often not readable in the visible world, and thus the visible itself is always already illegible.

Yet dominant conceptions of vision understand bodies as legible surfaces – or insist that they were once legible surfaces, but that proximity and contact with "otherness" has threatened to make (or, in some rhetoric, has already made) individual "American" bodies – and the U.S. national body – illegible. Such fictions insist that there was once a coherent and readable

national American body, and that race and sex were once readable and legible on the surfaces of human bodies; insisting on this loss of (or lost) coherence, histories of contact are effaced and denied in the name of sustaining a dominant power, which disavows its own contact and violence in the name of protecting its "self" from the encroaching "others" who threaten to make surfaces illegible and bodies indistinguishable. In conjunction with this denial of an inevitable always-already state of being in-contact, contact is further denied or effaced in the name of continuing to make supposed stable visual distinctions. Infants born with genitalia considered ambiguous, for example, are typically forced under the knife of heteronormativity for precisely these reasons. While Chapter 3 will focus on this issue in more depth, it is beneficial to introduce it in this context as well, because such surgeries are indicative of a larger narrative, a fiction which legitimates this coercion on the premise that bodies are naturally distinguishable – that sex (and sexuality, for that matter) are, or at least should be, distinguishable. Thus the contact that occurs in coercing such bodies to be distinguishable (male or female) is also effaced; the labor which produces "legible" sexes is elided and the "ambiguous" nature of sex itself is construed as an anomaly which can, and should be, "corrected" for the sake of the child's legibility, for her readability as a credible visual distinction from "the other" sex, imagined as a clearly delineated "other" entity, other sex. The contact between dominant ideologies, heteronormativity, the medical industry, parental concerns, and the infant are effaced in the name of protecting the child, which also works to protect the sustenance of norms which are imagined to be coherent, and bodies which are thought to be legible entities. Illegibility – indistinguishability, the unknown or unrecognizable – are formulated as a threat, and that threat justifies the coercions enforced in the name of an imaginary (originary) coherence. A queer vision or queer look is a loving look, which both acknowledges and embraces illegibility as the fundamental condition of

being in the world. This queer look sees contact in the invisible, even when power wishes to efface that contact, and deny the fullness of the "between," in the name of legibility.

Time and again I've seen *Maury Povich* specials that feature the spectacle, "Man or Woman?" during which the audience participates in what appears to be an enthralling guessing game of biological origin. "Women" are paraded across Maury's stage in revealing apparel to the wild cries of audience members who hold up signs displaying their opinions (either the "man" or "woman" side of a poster). Following another round of parading, the biological "truths" of these bodies are revealed. The thrill of the audience in the revelations of "truth" (particularly exciting, it seems, when audience members have hypothesized incorrectly) reveals the necessity of the audience to be given that truth-telling of the body at the end of the hour. Though there seems to be a fascination with the unknown and the illegible – at the audience's own incapacity to "read" and visually distinguish the differences between "one" biology and "the next," or "the other," – this is only permissible through the staging of these bodies as well as the promise not only that these bodies do, at long last, illicit a "truth," but also the guarantee that this truth will be revealed. The threat that this incapacity to visually distinguish, or "read," male from female might pose in another venue – where distinguishability might not be promised at the end of the hour, and where there is no stage to separate the possible suspects from the never-suspected audience members – is evident: "The harassment suffered by those who are 'read' as trans or discovered to be trans cannot be underestimated," writes Butler; "They are part of a continuum of the gender violence that took the lives of Brandon Teena, Mathew Shephard, and Gwen Araujo. And these acts of murder must be understood in connection with the coercive acts of 'correction' undergone by intersexed infants and children" (6). The revelation that surfaces (the visible) do not present themselves as legible, serves as a reminder of *the illegibility and*

unreadability of all surfaces, and the threat of incoherency, or ambiguity, to fictions of legibility, prompts both the desire for making that body legible (the end of the hour Maury reveal, for instance) as well as those instances in which one exercises violence toward a body considered unreadable. Thus in the violence done to those who are " 'read' as trans or discovered to be trans" is the desire to expunge this unreadable surface, so as to keep the surface legible – *always falsely so*. As Oliver and Ahmed both suggest, all surfaces are unreadable, since we must "see the invisible within the visible," and because the many backgrounds of physicality and historicity, production and consumption, and contact *of surfaces* cannot or do not necessarily *appear on surfaces themselves*.

Read You Like a Book: Queer Vision/Queer Looking/Queer Reading Practices

On the surface, the common expression "I can read you like a book" appears self-evident, and suggests that an other can be made fully readable before us. At the same time, there are particular assumptions about interactions between a reader and literature that form the backbone of this cliché. There is an assumed reading practice (in the reading of literature) that informs the supposed capacity to read an other, and this reading practice (of the book) presupposes that literature simply opens itself to us and exposes itself to us in full coherency. It assumes that nothing can be hidden, nothing erased, nothing repressed, nothing opaque. The book, it would seem, is wholly apprehendable and appropriable. Revoking the multiplicities of textualities that compose and intersect in textuality itself, this presupposition elides the in-betweenness of and in language, words, and literatures themselves. Such a conception of literature denies the contact of book with world; the physical object and the physical words on tangible and visible pages that comprise that object, are the limitations of its transactions and intermingling with the world. This elides various backgrounds of the book –its composition, its publication, the socio-political

contexts of its writing and the plural and palimpsestic contexts of its multiplicitous readings. Such a construction of literature effaces its numerous histories, and fetishizes the book as an object that reveals a clean narrative within clearly demarcated edges of the book as object.

In using the phrase "queer look," I am also, at once, arguing for queer *reading practices*. I do not venture this project with the purposes of bringing to visibility the invisible, since the invisible is that which, by definition, cannot be seen. The invisible cannot be appropriated by the eye, but neither, I argue, can the visible. A queer look, or a queer reading practice, does mean (in a sense, to use Oliver's phrase) to see the invisible in the visible. Thus, a queer look, or a queer reading practice, is still, as this language connotes, a way of seeing and reading. But, what is incorporated in such a look, vision, or reading practice, is the acknowledgement that *both* the realms of the visible and the invisible do not afford us totality of knowledge. It is a practice of reading that does not seek to permeate the thickness between with vision and absorb the Other as information that offers itself to be digested, understood, known and appropriated. Rather, it is a practice that seeks to acknowledge that thickness of the between that connects "I" and "Other," a material space that both separates us and places us into inevitable contact with one another. A queer reading practice is a practice of reading between, but also knowing that one can never see or make fully coherent, or legible, those pluralistic in-betweens.

These many intercrossings that enter into interactions between myself and a book before me make for the impossibility of whole coherency. There are tangible, yet not necessarily visible, interactions that go on in the space between a book and myself – the nerve endings of things and bodies and histories that do not, or cannot, surface. The phrase, "I can read you like a book," presumes that both bodies and objects can be made readable in their supposed totality and coherency, that the visible can possibly reveal to us the solid and entirely comprehensible

essence of a thing, or of an other. Like air, and like the invisible, literature itself is dense with a thick materiality, and in the in-between of every reader and writer and text there exists multiply textured and fleshly, if invisible, matter. To destroy the notion, then, that a book opens and presents itself in full legibility, an object disconnected or isolatable from the world, is itself to exercise a queer reading practice on typical conceptions of reading itself as a practice that can be queer. To contend with such a conception of the book might itself be a practice of contending with the ways in which we approach and "read" one another as bodies, and the national body itself.

Each text that comprises this project poses a challenge to realism and, in turn, contests the possibility of a fully coherent narrative of selfhood or embodiment, in that both texts and bodies are ongoingly in contact, and are thus both self and not-self. In his *In Defense of Realism*, Raymond Tallis describes anti-realist practices as incorporating, among other possible elements, the presence of deviant worlds, unreal worlds, unworlds, word worlds, and just "un." In other words, the worlds incorporated into anti-realist novels are precisely that – worlds, plural. According to Tallis, authors who create deviant worlds construct a world which deviates from that which actually exists. Referring explicitly to science fiction as a genre that characterizes this category, *Black No More* and *Naked Lunch* each, very differently, are set in what Tallis refers to as such "deviant worlds." Likewise, the work of both Burroughs and Dunn emerge in landscapes that might be considered what Tallis refers to as "unreal worlds." Wildly imaginative, they create spaces which are "dream-like, discontinuous, dehumanized, etc," and are "implicitly a reflection of, or an allegory for, the 'unreal reality' that comprises the actual world of the reader/writer" (97). Dunn's *Geek Love* in particular functions as an allegory through its distancing and alienating "foreignness." *Naked Lunch* might also read as an allegory, but more

significantly, works in a dreamlike and discontinuous state that also brings the text to what Tallis refers to as "un" – an element of anti-realism which fragmentation and incoherency permeate the structure of the text. Similarly, the disruptions that occur in even the more "realistic" *Middlesex* and *Invisible Man* incorporate what Tallis refers to as "word worlds." In their quite different contexts, both novels are often considered Bildungsromans and attributed with more typically "realistic" qualities. Yet each disrupts the reader's relationship to the text by reminding the reader that they are reading a novel, "that is to say that he is looking at words on a page" (97).

In addition, the satirical components at play in the work of Schuyler, Burroughs, and Dunn reflect the anti-realist elements that are implicitly incorporated into the genre of satire itself. The very conventions that define the genre are the implementation of exaggeration and absurdity (and at times, also, the grotesque, as we see in Dunn) in order to point to the absurdity of "reality" itself. Each works as a critique of "the 'unreal reality' that comprises the actual world of the reader/writer." As I have noted, what primarily defines this genre is the conceptual acknowledgement not of *the* world, but of worlds. The real, in each of these texts, is always already the unreal (as the self is always both self and other than self), and multiple worlds are occurring within the context of a singular novel. Even the intergenerational storylines that permeate both *Geek Love* and *Middlesex* suggest the multiplicitous worlds that are ongoing and in contact with one another; pasts, presents, and futures are palimpsestic and non-linear. The disorientation and incoherencies of identities, landscapes, language, and time in *Naked Lunch* similarly immerses us in worlds that are inescapably plural.

The anti-realism that characterizes each of these texts corresponds with the ethical arguments that bring them together in this project. This dissertation contests the notion that

bodies, that "the Other," can be made readable before me – that he can be made wholly knowable and that my vision can, and should, afford me this knowledge. As each of these texts asks us to re-think the ways in which we perceive and "read" the world, each also challenges the idea that there is a reality that can be made known before me, a singular world – a singular object, body, event – before me that is ultimately wholly accessible and somehow more "real" than those "unreal" worlds portrayed in these texts. The dystopian spaces, the interruption of voices, and the absurdities of the (un)real all disrupt notions not only of linearity (of space or time), of singularity (of identity or world), but deliberately remind us of the incoherencies of any body or text – and our incapacity to access a body or text in totality, since the real is always already the unimaginable, the inaccessible, the unknowable, the unseeable, the unreal. While bodies are, of course, real – and our real, pressing need to address how we approach them of urgent importance – the desire to recognize the coherent, linear, "real" story that they supposedly can tell, remains the product of a mythology of vision that rests on false concepts of purity, isolation, readability, and the real.

Reading Queer Reading Practices: The Project

In Chapter 1, I argue that discourses of otherness that were *specifically* articulated through registers of visibility, and through fears of illegibility, emerged in the early decades of the 20th century in the United States. This chapter begins with a discussion of faces, and notes the cultural concerns in the United States that center on the fear of illegible faces – faces on which histories and genealogies cannot be "read." The threat of this loss of coherent facial features, also constructed as a threat to the "face of the nation," works through both a fetishization of genealogical lines, and through an erasure of contact between bodies. With this supposed threat toward legibility emerges what I refer to as "narratives of purity," which are

sustained precisely by that denial or negation of contact between bodies, objects, and labor. In this chapter, I adopt what Sara Ahmed refers to as "mixed genealogies" in order to confront and expose such contact – contact which, Ahmed argues, can be lost sight of (can become invisible), though can never *not be*. Integrating a reading of George Schuyler's 1931 novel *Black No More* and Ralph Ellison's 1952 novel *Invisible Man*, this chapter focuses on the exposure of histories of mixing, and emphasizes that this contact does not necessarily appear on the surface. Enmeshed within these readings is also the focus on the illegibility of the face – the desire of dominant power to distinguish and read facial features – and the argument that such legibility is impossible, and that the desire for legibility is violent.

Schuyler's satirical text presents readers with questions of homogenization and purity, of constructed racial lines and their material effects. Schuyler prompts these interrogations through the invention of a medical apparatus that permits Black Americans to become white. Considering this alongside a cosmetic (both beauty and surgical) industry, burgeoning in the 20s and 30s in the United States, that wished to homogenize through the "whitening" of facial features, this chapter will consider the various means by which power fictionalizes a once legible face with distinguishing (or distinguishable) features – which is being overtaken, submerged by the presence or infringement of the facial features of racial "others." *Black No More* speaks to a historical, political and social milieu that emerged in the early decades of the 20th century in the United States – a context in which beauty and cosmetics industries began to proliferate, as I have mentioned, with whitening products and procedures. I argue that this proliferation, to which Schuyler's text in part responds and with which it negotiates, grew in response to the second "wave" of immigration and in response to the migration of a large portion of the black population in the South toward the urban spaces of the North. I argue that it is with such shifting

dynamics, and the multiplication of such whitening commodities, that concerns over the "face of the nation," and the legibility of that face, flourished.

This chapter will also largely focus on histories of contact that are effaced in the name of creating pure genealogical lines, which continue to insist on originary distinguishable selves and others, separated by a gap of empty space which protects "one" from contact with "the Other." This chapter will also focus on Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, a narrative which works to expose histories as, and of, contact. Ellison's text, which circulates around concerns of visibility, asks us to acknowledge the persistence and presence of the invisible – contact – and to approach otherness with a "look of love." Ellison's novel, which also offers images of contact that refuse to disregard the presence and significance of the invisible, suggests a connection between fears over illegibility and fears over migration, mobility, and movement. I suggest that the danger posed by the prospect of movement and mobility in the early 20th century is intimately connected to the threat posed to presumed possible, and desirable, legibility – of both the individual and national body. When one "stays in place,"[3] cartographical lines of both geography and body can imaginarily be preserved. As Ellison's text suggests, the possibility of staying in one's place without *always already moving* is itself a fiction that works in concert with the supposed possibility of legibility and non-contact between not only between literature and the world (which Ellison's Invisible Man does demonstrate), but between the self and its others. I argue that both Schuyler and Ellison produce narratives that contest the notion that surfaces can ever be made wholly legible, or that some prior point of pure facial or bodily features once existed. I argue that Schuyler's and Ellison's texts work to produce images of distraught genealogical and racial lines, images which disrupt imagined notions of a once pure and legible "face of the nation" and "national body."

Chapter 2 focuses on William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, tracing how discourses of legibility which (as I argue in the first chapter, emerge in the early decades of the 20th century) continue to infiltrate how "Otherness" is imagined and constructed in the United States through registers of visibility. Burroughs' text negotiates the dominant and official rhetoric of the Cold War era, and presents a parody of that desire for, and faith in, the possibility of an ultimate legibility of "the Other." Additionally, Burroughs presents a world that contests dominant conceptions of consumerism, providing an "Interzonal" dimension of abject body parts, fluids, and a text that is itself abject material. In the bodies that continually appear in any exchange of commodities throughout *Naked Lunch*, the novel disrupts narratives of isolation that, I argue, insist on an isolatable body, and isolatable consumer choices. In *Naked Lunch*, readers are catapulted into a mess of betweenness, and that betweenness is full, material, and thick. These characteristics of Burroughs' geographical and bodily spaces refuse the imagined spaces of prior non-contact, and the presumed gulf of nothingness that supposedly leaves an empty space between.

In this chapter, I also suggest that Burrough's text presents us with a zone of contact in which the flesh of the body and what Maurice-Merleau Ponty calls the "flesh of the world"[4] are always already intercrossing. Burroughs' world itself takes on flesh, and thus the body of the self is always already ongoingly in contact and altering its dimensions. Burroughs' Interzone, a space in which invisibility and illegibility flourish, and in which the world begins to evidence its own fleshliness, is a space in which I propose we might reconceive of embodiment, as not isolatable or extricatable. The Interzone exists not only at literal crossroads of geographic place, but also at the intersections of what might be considered the margins or orifices of the social body. Since this project focuses on the protection of imagined pure bodies, the vulgarities of the

body that explode all over Burroughs' Interzone ask for an interpretation of embodiment that demands one acknowledge that the inside is not wholly out, nor out wholly in. The contact that occurs in the spaces that are "between" in Burroughs' text emphasize the heavy materiality of those "between" spaces. I also contend that *Naked Lunch* itself challenges the reader to immerse herself in queer practices of reading, refusing the give the reader coherent voices, legible bodies, or a text that reads "like a book."[5]

Chapter 3 contends that both bodily shape (or morphology) and binary dinstinctions of sex are premised on the performance, and the reiterative performance, of legibility. This chapter will discuss what I refer to as fictions of protection, which I argue are narratives that work to protect the body of the violator, and function by the alleviation of responsibility and the erasure of violation though discourses of both tragedy and saviors. In discussing Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love*, a novel that deals with a family of carnival freaks, I present fictions of protection as a those narratives which articulate coercion and violence as forms of protection. I argue that discourses of tragedy and impossibility constitute the production and reiteration of "coherent" shapes and bodily forms. The labor effaced in the name of producing such "coherences" will be a focal point of this discussion, as will be the discourses of "protection" utilized to justify violence and coercion in the name of creating shapes that do not threaten to alter the contours of social arrangement and the nation, and threaten to mobilize and alter supposed immobile norms that govern and keep safe the body-politic.

Labor and coercion are effaced in the name of "saving" and that saving, in turn, effaces the body that is violated and the act of violation itself. I move from discussing *Geek Love* into a conversation which focuses on both intersexed infants and disabilities studies, charting how this narrative, evidenced in the context of societal "protection" enacted in Dunn's novel, operates in

the contexts of both intersexed infants and infants born (or who "threaten" to be born) with disabilities. The rhetoric of tragedy, saviors, and protection proliferates in response to many of these births. In this chapter, I also focus on Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex*, arguing that the narrator of the novel imagines both a face and a name – along with volition and desire – to the body that is continually erased in the construction of narratives that create saviors, tragedy, and protection only through that effacement. I suggest that these texts are reminders of the violence – and those violated bodies – that are elided, or made invisible, in the construction of such narratives. These erasures work only to further suggest that the surface/the visible does not speak of and for itself, and that the activity and labor that do not meet the surface do not negate their violence and significance. I argue that Dunn and Eugenides work to produce images of violence that often remain invisible – repressed, hidden, effaced – and that we might challenge claims to protection that rely on false notions of pure biological sex and coherent bodily constitutions.

Chapter 4 addresses the theories of embodiment, subjecthood, and readability discussed in the first three chapters, and takes them to the screen. Presenting visual work that, I argue, itself presents a skepticism of the visible, can contribute to an understanding of embodiment as inevitably, fundamentally illegible. Each of the visual artifacts – all contemporary – that I have selected for this chapter also offer characters in states of betweenness, and thus each text contests the narratives of purity, isolation, and protection that are discussed in the first three chapters of this project. I begin this chapter with a reading of select episodes of the television series *Nip/Tuck*, and connect these to Schuyler's *Black No More* in its mixed genealogies that do not reveal themselves on the surface. These episodes, like Schuyler's text, contest notions of purity of origin, linearity, or legibility. David Cronenberg's *Videodrome*, the focus of the second

portion of this chapter, resists narratives of isolation and proposes embodiment as abject, messy, and always already in-contact (never once-pure). The final visual artifact I approach in this chapter is the film *XXY*, which poses a direct challenge to notions of protection that enable coercive normativizing surgeries, and conveys the violence of forcibly imposed bodily distinctions of legibility. Again, each of these visual texts also presents bodies in-between: transitional, interdependent, vulnerable, outside themselves, and as always already "impure." Violence toward bodies that fall "in between" (the lines of legibility) has continually been reiterated and justified through cultural representations of bodies that both require and deserve to be punished, coerced, or altered to fit the normative model of society. These texts, instead, work to challenge those systems of representation, and enable different modes of identifying with between-ness, instead of relying on the narratives of purity, isolation, and protection that have been constructed to rationalize violence in the face of difference.

Concluding Note

This introduction begins with a quote from Butler's *Undoing Gender*. Although this project works to develop the proposals made in regard to intelligibility in Butler's text, the striking way that Butler connects legibility and violence in the text has been a continued influence in the development of this project. It is also Butler's focus on allowing the human to take different forms – even if not socially, culturally, even medically recognizable forms – in the name of non-violence that motivates this project. Against an age of legibility, this project proposes, in the vein of Butler's "ethical query," to reconceive of embodiment as a fundamentally incoherent and unreadable experience of being within and of the world. All bodies are always already in-contact: with cultural imaginings; with medical industries; with scientific discourses and technologies; with the food they eat, the environment in which they

live, and the products they buy; with outside “impurities” and “foreign” agents; with, most importantly, other human bodies and lives. With this always-already state of being in contact, it follows that bodies and subjects are always, ongoingly, both self and other-than-self. In that instability that underlies all embodiment, then, legibility is a construction that is performed and reiterated. It is urgent, in the name of those bodies whose differences – whose unreadable or unrecognizable features – provoke or justify violence, that the fundamental misconception of a primary readability (based on norms that are themselves incoherent and contingent) undergo transformation. Thus, this project aims to intervene in those regimes of readability that suggest that each body can and should be made intelligible. This resistance enters by way of gathering texts that conceive of embodiment as fundamentally in-contact, incessantly altering dimensions, in always–already states of betweenness and illegibility.

Chapter 1
Fictions of Purity, Fears of Illegibility, and the Face of the Nation: Mixing Trees & Paint in Schuyler's *Black No More* and Ellison's *Invisible Man*

"This book is dedicated to all Caucasians in the great republic who can trace their ancestry back ten generations and confidently assert that there are no Black leaves, twigs, limbs or branches on their family trees." – George S. Schuyler, *Black No More*, Epigraph

"A genealogy of being mixed hence allows us to see the mixtures that are concealed in the lines of the conventional family tree; as we become unseated from our dwelling places, we might notice how objects can take us to other places. Perhaps then genealogy itself becomes a rather queer as well as mixed thing" – Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 154

Who's Who

In 1903, Dr. Henry Pancoast was researching and speaking on the therapeutic effects of X-Ray technologies. While his work was initially received with skepticism, he eventually gained recognition and reknown as newspapers and the public proclaimed that Pancoast had proven X-Ray therapies much more successful than previously imagined – that he had even been able to turn black skin white. Pancoast publicly denied that he had whitened the skin of any African American, stating that this would be both "dangerous" and an "unfortunate accident" (de la Peña 28). As Caroline Thomas de la Peña points out, however, Dr. Thomas Edwin Eldridge and Robert Roos – a chemistry student – did, in fact, attempt in 1904 "to combine X rays with radium to intentionally replicate Pancoast's 'unfortunate accident'" (29). This resulted, de la Peña claims, in a series of "sensationalist stories" (29) about the whitening of black skin. Challenging the notion that any X-Ray/radium experiments truly resulted in any true skin whitening procedures, she goes on to reveal that there are no newspapers that actually covered any of the whitening experiments of Pancoast, Eldridge, or Roos. De la Peña states that, "While it is possible that a more comprehensive search might reveal some degree of coverage, the fact that the two newspapers did not cover these particular experiments—even as they found other

accounts of radium and X-ray discoveries to be relevant—suggests that the sensationalist accounts may have been generated less by actual events than by whites' fears of what might happen" (30). She continues that, "The question, then, is not why such experiments occurred, but rather why whites across the country believed they did; additionally, how did this belief affect those committed to 'natural' categories of racial superiority at a time when technologies appeared to challenge accepted notions of physical limits and differences" (32). In addition to imagining a "successful" outcome to the skin whitening experiments of turn of the century, George Shuyler's 1931 novel *Black No More* reflects both the developments of technologies along with "whites' fears of what might happen" in response to those technologies. The novel also negotiates not only the fears affiliated with growing technologies, but the public response to difference prompted by immigration to, and migration within, the U.S. during the early decades of the century.

A mechanic in *Black No More* professes a concern that burgeoned in the U.S. during the early decades of the twentieth century: "It's gittin' so yuh can't tell who's who" (58). Along with the rumors of whitening experiments at the turn of the century, the growth and movement of non-white populations within the U.S. during the first quarter of the century prompted discourses that centered on the visual signifiers of the face, reflecting the fear of not being able to determine "who's who." The question of "who's who" haunts the characters in *Black No More*, but the text refuses the search for purity implicit in this question through the continued appearance of unreadable faces. Mixing and contact are always already ongoing in *Black No More*, yet such mixing and contact are not necessarily visible on the surfaces of bodies, or on faces. Schuyler satirizes the concept of purity, and of prior spaces of non-contact, throughout the course of his text.

Black No More charts the tale of Max Disher, a black man living in New York City, as he becomes the first recipient of a medical procedure that offers him permanently white skin, at which time he adopts the name "Matthew Fisher." Dr. Junius Crookman, inventor of the new procedure, opens Black-No-More, Inc., and the business expands rapidly, vastly, across the U.S. This quick and massive movement leaves many white citizens feeling afraid, resentful, and deceived. Initiatives to protect the "purity" of whiteness begin to proliferate in newspapers and white supremacy groups. With the immense popularity of Crookman's medical procedure comes the disappearance of delineable skin pigmentation, and this disappearance threatens the stability of the white power structures that are premised solely on that pigmentation. While the characters in *Black No More* continue to articulate the possibility of legible faces, Schuyler's satirical narrative conveys the absurdity of such claims to legibility and purity. Suggesting that histories of contact and mixing are not necessarily visible on surfaces, Schuyler proposes that claims to purity can only be imaginary, persisting through the erasure or aversion of that contact and mixing. When white supremacists, supposedly of the "purest" white stock, prove to descend from "mixed" genealogies and contact between black and white bodies, *Black No More* suggests that supposed legibility and purity are merely fictions.

Immigration, Submersion, & Illegibility

Black No More emerged alongside multiple concerns with legibility that accompanied immigration and migration in the U.S., and the musings of the mechanic as to "who's who" reflect a national panic of readability that was heightened at this time. But counteracting dominant discourses, Schuyler's novel suggests that faces are always already illegible, and that this panic primarily emerges from the desire to keep the hierarchies of a white power structure in place. Elizabeth Haiken, historian of cosmetic surgery, notes that preceding 1890, the majority

of immigrants to the U.S. were arriving from northern and western Europe, but that between 1890 and 1920, most immigrants to the U.S. were from eastern and southern European nations. This "second wave" tended to settle in the cities, and the fear of "submersion" (even though, as Haiken notes, the number of immigrants only increased slightly in these years) became a threat in the eyes of white citizens born in the U.S. In addressing the effect that white fear had on regulations, Haiken states:

> The anxious atmosphere created by the new immigration inspired concern among individual nativist politicians and groups, including organized labor. Together, their efforts led, eventually, to the immigration restriction acts of the 1920s, which set quotas based on a nostalgic vision of how the country ought to look (after excluding first Chinese and then Japanese immigrants, legislators set strict quotas that privileged northern and western Europeans over those from the 'less desireable' countries that had spawned the second 'wave.') (178)

The restrictions set in place thus aimed to maintain white facial and bodily features of the nation; these features were presumed at once to be stable and endangered. Fearing the submersion of Caucasian features by contact with "others," immigration restrictions evidenced a growing need to "protect" (see Chapter 3) what was rhetorically construed as the dissipating, pure, and homogenous white national body. This also spawned, Haiken argues, innovations in supposedly scientific approaches to race. Particularly insistent in these emerging theories was a centering on facial features. In the discourses emerging around this "second wave," particular facial features became emphatic signifiers and, as Haiken suggests, for some time, "the science of physiognomy – whose practitioners believed they could identify and classify facial and other features and from them divine personality traits – enjoyed wide publicity and popularity in the United States"

(178). Unsurprisingly, "scientific" discourses at this time intersected, then, with the national panic over the face of the nation. Revealing its contours as shaped by, and contingent upon, political and social contexts, the "science" of physiognomy made one of its few modern appearances since its prominence in the ancient Greek world.

While immigration provoked a fearful white response, black migration *within* the nation posed a threat of "submersion" that also took on visual dynamics. Between the 1910s and 1930s, the Great Migration from the South to the North of many African-Americans threatened the supposed stable structure of whiteness. These migrations were also changing what the "face of the nation" looked like. Detroit's black population, for instance, went from about 1% in 1910 to almost 8% in 1930; the black population of Iowa, as another example, increased 27% between 1910 and 1920 (Adelman, et. al 217). The mobility and movement (and hence instability) presented by migrating bodies challenged the existing social order, and projects in establishing solid signifiers for facial features proliferated, evidencing a particular desire to ground "otherness" as a coded, and thus legible, surface. If the nation itself was unstable in its dimensions and constituents, the face had to take on that quality of stability, in order to ensure the readability of difference. Haiken notes that the coding and stabling of facial features, implemented in order to distinguish otherness, "emerged from contemporaneous, and not unrelated, historical processes – for example, the impetus toward immigration restriction coincided with whites' increasing discomfort about a growing black presence in northern cities – and they shared the goals of defining 'difference'" (176). Fears of "submersion" were articulated specifically within discourses of visibility and readability; while illegibility was to be feared, it was also to be overcome, through a shoring up of that "other," by making his face infinitely decipherable. As the scientific obsession with readability of faces and bodies

blossomed in the first decades of the twentieth century in the United States in a re-emergence of physiognomy, so too did science articulate an expression of genetic traits that was both deceptive to the eye, but ultimately readable by the medical/scientific investigatory gaze (as discussed in the Introduction). *Black No More* evidences a continued flourishing of this obsession with facial features that Haiken argues stemmed from the "second wave" of immigration into the United States, and also functions in response to the Great Migration, both of which threatened the supposed legibility of the "face of the nation."

Fears of (In)Distinguishability: "Chromatic Emancipation" in *Black No More*

In describing the enormous population of black Americans transitioning to whiteness in *Black No More*, Harryette Mullen writes: "The result is that everyone in the land of the free is left guessing who among them used to be black. The satire assumes that all African-Americans, if given the chance, would choose to be white, although of course whiteness in this instance cannot be separated from its synonyms: freedom, equality, opportunity, privilege" (75). Such synonyms are, indeed, inseparable from whiteness in Schuyler's text. Max Disher, Black-No-More's first patient, repeatedly articulates that these synonyms motivate his decision. Following the whitening procedure, Max basks in his new skin:

> Gone were the slightly full lips and Ethiopian nose. Gone was the nappy hair that he had straightened so meticulously ever since the kink-no-more lotions first wrenched Aframericans from the tyranny and torture of the comb. There would be no more expenditures for skin whiteners; no more discrimination; no more obstacles in his path [. . .] It thrilled him to feel that he was now indistinguishable from nine-tenths of the people of the United States; one of the great majority. Ah, it was good not to be a Negro any longer! (18-19)

Max's reaction might be read as a betrayal, or as a result of internalized ideologies of racism and white supremacy. Yet the power, equality, opportunity, and privilege synonymous with whiteness cannot be eclipsed by such readings. Max does not embrace whiteness solely due to an internalization of white aesthetic values, which dictate that he straighten his hair and lighten his skin, but also because with whiteness comes "no more discrimination, no more obstacles in his path." Max's "thrilling" excitement emerges from both the mobility and equality that are afforded him in white skin. In Max's elation, he suggests that indistinguishability offers him new opportunities. In gaining whiteness, Max's appearance becomes subordinated to his personhood, and race no longer constrainingly, negatively precedes where he can move, what he can do, and how he is treated. Again he expresses this ecstasy in his new skin while walking through Times Square: "He had strolled through the Times Square district before but never with such a feeling of absolute freedom and sureness" (22). Max's skin gives him access to spaces previously inaccessible, and grants him the possibility of walking through spaces unseen, in that he is no longer marked and preceded by his skin. His whiteness opens spaces and affords him opportunity, rather than obstacles. Schuyler implies that Max's transformation emanates from the desire for the privileges of whiteness, rather than (or, at the very least, in addition to) a result of internalized notions of (white) aesthetics. Not long after his own procedure, Max muses over his decision, and "felt a momentary pang of mingled disgust, disillusionment and nostalgia. But it was only momentary" (23). The momentary feeling of self-disgust with his transformation, and nostalgic longings for his former skin, proves fleeting because Max is aware of the various privileges that accompany, are synonymous with, whiteness.

The problem of faces and social inequities permeates Schuyler's text. Haiken notes that most cosmetic surgical patients who sought "ethnic surgery" in the past (and, I would add, in the

present), "claimed to have limited goals. They had no desire to deny their religion or their ethnic heritage, they assert; they merely hoped to blend in better, to become indistinguishable and thus to reap the benefits that were generally available to those not perceived as different" (186).[6] In fact, the presence of "ethnic" cosmetic surgery is not disconnected from the concerns raised in Schuyler's text. One of these benefits, as is often claimed, is being viewed as an individual rather than a stereotype; and the individuality garnered by indistinguishability occurs by way of whiteness transcending categories of race. Like many of the early (and even present-day) patients of cosmetic surgery, the patients we encounter in Schuyler's text articulate a desire for whiteness not in blind acceptance of white beauty norms, but on the grounds that the elimination of the signs of difference that charted them as other, according to the coding that society inscribed on facial and bodily features, would benefit them socially and economically.

Despite the growth spurt that followed WWII, cosmetic surgery did have a presence in U.S. society preceding this escalation, and would have likely been familiar to Schuyler. Haiken describes the nose job performed on actress Fanny Brice in 1923, and suggests that while Brice stated that she was not attempting to "hide" her Jewish "origin" (182), Brice "evidently realized that a successful career depended on beauty, and that beauty meant the absence of the clear signs of race or ethnicity that could be damaging, if not fatal, to an entertainment career" (183). Haiken describes Brice as being one of many who fit into the category of desiring an indistinguishability, in order to reap the social and economic rewards of appearing white (Anglo-Saxon). Haiken expresses the consistent goals of cosmetic surgery patients between the years of 1933 and 1953:

> Many of these patients cited the explicit or implicit goal of ethnic anonymity. They did not want to become something other than what they were: none cited a

> desire to pass, none changed their names, none planned to move away. But they did not want others to be able to identify them on sight as something other than generic American. They wanted to be seen as individuals rather than as members of a group and to be able to control what they revealed about themselves to others. The fact that so many prospective patients from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds cited the issue of 'difference' suggests that this concept clearly had as its reference point a standard of appearance that derived from a particular definition of 'whiteness' – not just Caucasian, but Anglo-Saxon. (189)

Again, Haiken reiterates the motivation of indistinguishability – as I have referred to it – that lies beneath the articulation of desires for more Anglo-Saxon features. Whiteness stood as the norm, invisible in its lack of "other" signification, signification that was constructed and stabilized by a white imagination that aimed to "keep" coherent borders between self and otherness (as well as white and "other") intact. Thus indistinguishability permitted entry into a norm that guaranteed power unafforded to those marked as different than it (non-white). This will be explored further later, in the context of Schuyler's novel and the reiterated goal of indistinguishability, but let me first return back to the historical trends described by Haiken as they pertain to Schuyler's text. If Schuyler was not directly aware of the surgical industry's participation in the racial and aesthetic ideological trends that defined beauty through the absence of "other" (non-white) signifiers, he was most certainly aware of a more general cosmetics and beauty industry, and its participation in those very trends. Schuyler writes in the preface of *Black No More*:

> Over twenty years ago a gentleman in Asbury Park, N.J. began manufacturing and advertising a preparation for the immediate and unfailing straightening of the most stubborn Negro hair. This preparation was called Kink-No-More, a name

> not wholly accurate since users of it were forced to renew the treatment every fortnight. During the intervening years many chemists, professional and amateur, have been seeking the means of making the downtrodden Aframerican resemble as closely as possible his white fellow citizen. The temporarily effective preparations placed on the market have so far proved exceedingly profitable to manufacturers, advertising agencies, Negro newspapers and beauty culturists, while millions of users have registered great satisfaction at the opportunity to rid themselves of kinky hair and grow several shades lighter in color, if only for a brief time. With America's constant reiteration of the superiority of whiteness, the avid search on the part of the black masses for some key to chromatic perfection is easily understood. Now it would seem that science is on the verge of satisfying them. (xix)

Many of Schuyler's observations about the politics of aesthetics conveyed in the beauty culture of his time emerge over the course of the novel. While straightening products for African Americans were around as early as the mid-nineteenth century,[7] Schuyler conveys the proliferation of such products over the early decades of the twentieth century. "Kink-No-More" provides an obvious point of departure from moving between the cosmetics industry and the medical industry in the novel, as Kink-No-More, a hair straightening product Schuyler is familiar with outside the context of the novel, takes as its fictional counterpart the Black-No-More, Inc., medical treatment that guarantees permanent results in its clients' white appearance. Haiken notes that aesthetic surgery, "lies at the nexus of medicine and consumer culture" (12), and this intersection emerges in the product Kink-No-More and, as Schuyler puts it, the newspapers, beauty advertisements and "culturists." The overlap between medical treatments or procedures

and consumer culture, beauty advertisements and the surgical industry, evidence the ideological impetus of shaping racial features. And as the novel progresses, its linkages to "ethnic" cosmetic surgeries, particularly in the rhetoric that coalesces around the goals of patients, doctors, and the industry itself, evidences a striking resonance. The privileges afforded to Max Disher once he comes to inhabit whiteness is evident – gone are the prejudices and obstacles that stood in his way as a man who was placed into the visual register of blackness. These privileges have to do with entering the world of indistinguishability. Gilman writes that, "(In)visibility is the goal of all aesthetic procedures. Aesthetic procedures are intended to move an individual from being visible in one cohort to being a member of another cohort or collective, which is *so* visible that its visibility becomes defined as the 'normal.' The 'normal' defines itself as invisible" (4). In *Black No More*, invisibility is attained by Max Disher's through his transition to Matthew Fisher, and into the white world. His race becomes invisible, and he is therefore seen. It is indistinguishability – invisibility – which grants him the freedom to move through the streets of Times Square with a sureness about his body. He is able, in this sense, to transcend race. He becomes a human first; his image, his face, no longer precedes his humanness. In the alteration of his skin hue from black to white, Schulyer's protagonist comes to inhabit the (in)visible space of normative whiteness.

Homogenizing Practices and "The Face of the Nation"

Scholarship on the issue of cosmetic, or aesthetic, surgery has been all but silent when it comes to the "face," or the kinds of faces, which the industry seeks to shape. Elizabeth Haiken has also discussed the racial implications of surgeries performed in order to "westernize" facial features to fit the Anglo-Saxon ideals promulgated and continually upheld by American society. Haiken suggests that, even at the inception of the industry as a consolidated entity, plastic

surgeons maintained that beauty was either subjective or objective, “rather than normative” – relying on Caucasian/Anglo-Saxon aesthetic standards. She notes that, “as they organized, they chose as their symbol the Venus de Milo, a classic icon of white, western beauty” (10). Sander Gilman, who has also written extensively on the cultural, social, and political implications of plastic surgery, suggests that racial features of the face shaped the dynamics of the surgical industry. Gilman, like Haiken, writes extensively on the Anglo-Saxon features idealized in American society that lead many Jewish women (and, to a lesser extent, men) to seek rhinoplasty, in hopes of eradicating the features distinguishing the nose as “Jewish.” Gilman also directly addresses the emphasis on the face in the context of plastic surgery as the industry developed:

> In the Enlightenment, the desire to efface individual difference came to be a part of the creation of a ‘public’ face, and it slowly became the task of the physician and the surgeon to address this need to efface difference. As Richard Sennett notes, ‘Nowhere was the attempt to blot out the individual character of a person more evident than in the treatment of the face. Both men and women used face paint, either red or white, to conceal the natural color of the skin and any blemishes it might have.’ (20)

As Gilman and Sennett both emphasize, the face became a particularly significant canvas on which concerns over homogenization and difference were engaged. When Gilman discusses the attempted consolidation of a particularly “public face,” he alludes to what I argue is the attempt at a consolidated image of the “face of the nation.” And this public face took a very particular form, and encompassed particular (white) features. It is no secret that, as Deborah Caslav Covino notes, “the aesthetic surgical industry tends to universalize Caucasian features as

preferred" (47). While many patients who seek "ethnic" plastic surgery disavow the desire to adopt more "Caucasian" facial features, Haiken explores such claims throughout her text, posing a challenge to the notion that one might simply want to be "prettier." She notes that, "Words like 'prettier,' and 'better,' [. . .] are explicitly comparative in nature; they beg the question 'than what?', as well as the more complex question of how definitions and standards of appearance came to be. Once that historical question has been raised, accepting such terms at face value becomes more problematic" (213). Haiken challenges the "face value" of aesthetic value systems. What she seeks to make overt is *the work done*, hidden in the rhetoric of "pretty" and "beautiful," in order to create specific (white, Caucasian) *face values* that correspond with such terms. As Sara Ahmed states, "What passes through history is not only the work done by generations, but the 'sedimentation' of that work is the condition of arrival for future generations. Objects take the shape of history; objects 'have value' and they take the shape of labor" (41). To produce the value of "prettier," or "better," requires labor, which may not take visible, apparent form in how aesthetic values are both produced and disseminated. Haiken poses a direct challenge to the notion of aesthetics as being shaped outside of culture, and outside of societal inequities; rather, she suggests that such standards are shaped precisely within such dynamics. Aesthetics, according to Haiken, cannot but be ideological and political, despite the claims of the industry.

While Schuyler's text most certainly critiques and expresses an ideological opposition to the homogenizing practices being fostered within his social and historical context, *Black No More* also raises questions about the racist, violent ideologies that often lurk under the rhetoric of opposition to homogenization. Schuyler's satire suggests that some oppositional positions emerge only through a claim to legible and delineable otherness, and also through a desire for the

protection of the rights, privileges, and property that supposedly belongs to (imagined) "pure" white bodies. Schuyler challenges the motivations of the multiple parties that oppose the practices of Black-No-More, Incorporated. Initially, Junius Crookman – discoverer of the black-to-white treatment, and founder of Black-No-More – is surprised, as are others, at the opposition provoked by the industry. Desire for stability and legibility come to fruition in the figure of faces in the novel. The newspapers in Schulyer's novel express their repulsion at the goings-on of the whitening business:

> Day by day we see the color line which we have so laboriously established being rapidly destroyed. There would not be so much cause for alarm in this were it not for the fact that this vitiligo is not hereditary. In other words, THE OFFSPRING OF THESE WHITENED NEGROES WILL BE NEGROES! This means that your daughter, having married a supposed white man, may find herself with a black baby! (32)

The newspapers' call to protect the purity of whiteness effectively *does* oppose homogenizing practices. However, opposition to the practice itself does not emanate from a critique of white aesthetic value systems, but rather from a protection of the "synonyms" that accompany whiteness – power, privilege, opportunity, fair treatment. It is also the reproduction of blackness that poses a threat to whiteness, a fear of "submersion" not disconnected from the concerns with legibility and majority articulated with the "waves" of immigration and migration dominating discourses of otherness in Schuyler's time.

Significantly, the newspaper (perhaps unwittingly) acknowledges the establishment of a color line – the establishment of a line dividing "one" from "the other" – as a product of intense labor, rather than as a natural line of demarcation. Not only does this threaten the concept of

pure, whole bodies and readable, legible faces; it throws the constructed line that promises distinguishability between "one" and "the other" into absolute upheaval. This opposition also stems from the fear of signs of contact – histories of contact – being brought to the surface. The pure body is destroyed in such an upheaval, and thus the newspapers call for a unified protection of a body and a face that is white, and for the protection of legibility itself. The danger is in the loss of a (constructed) line, and the loss of (a supposed) legibility of the body, in the contact between presumed pure white and pure black bodies. And the danger lurking in the destruction of lines and legibility, for the characters in Schuyler's novel who oppose Crookman's business, predominantly resides in fears about the loss of power, privilege, and opportunity. The characters who oppose homogenization in *Black No More* oppose homogenization on the grounds not of embracing difference, but on the grounds that it threatens white power, and white power structures.

It is important to continue to critique the homogenizing practices of the cosmetic surgery industry, which seek to whiten and westernize bodies. Yet sometimes the forces that appeared to oppose homogenizing practices– which we might see in the opposition elicited in response to the Black-No-More industry in Schuyler's novel – often elicit equally racist rhetoric, that also seeks the stability of the "face of the nation," and presumes a purity of race; it depicts race as monolithic, singular, and once-distinguishable. Schuyler's work helps us to understand how this might be the case. As the protagonist Max Disher/Matthew Fisher states, "The attitude of these people [who opposed the work of Black-No-More, Inc.] puzzled him. Was not Black-No-More getting rid of the Negroes upon whom all of the blame was placed for the backwardness of the South?" (44) Max/Matthew expresses puzzlement in regard to the opposition toward Black-No-More because of the contrary position that it holds. This confusion results from his

understanding that those protesting are actually those he assumed would uphold or support Dr. Crookman's work, as it aims to "get rid of the Negroes upon whom all of the blame was placed"; in other words, it aims to make the U.S. precisely what that opposition seems to desire – a place comprised exclusively of whites. Yet these oppositional voices speak to the mechanisms through which these concepts of purity lurk within that "opposition." Opposition is obviously not voiced out of an embrace of difference; rather, it bespeaks of a continued desire to uphold beliefs of pure origins and readable bodies that are naturally delineable and distinguishable between "one" and "the other." In other words, what may appear to be an opposition to homogenizing practices can, in fact, reiterate narratives of vision that insist on an originary gap or gulf between bodies that denies the ongoing, even if invisible, contact between them.

Pure Li(n)es

Schulyer's novel exposes purity as a lie, a mythology, precisely through the "impurity" of its most racist and purist characters. As ancestry data is generated, the leaders of the Knights of Nordica and the Anglo-Saxon Association – two groups whose work hinges on the legacy of the Klan, and whose leaders pride themselves on their distinguished, and distinguishably, white and proper heritage – are revealed to possess black roots, black blood. In Ishmael Reed's introduction to *Black No More*, he writes: "Armed with an encyclopedic mind, Schuyler's wit careens through a number of issues during the course of the book, but his brilliant dissection of the Great American Lie, that the majority of African and European Americans are products of pure race pedigree, is perhaps the reason why this book has not been given credit for the author's literary achievement" (xi). The Great American Lie, as Reed calls it, is dissected very poignantly in the revelation of the "true lines" that move beneath the surface (or rather, invisibly *within* the surface) of the color lines that distinguish white from black in the world of *Black No*

More. Schuyler's epigraph/dedication, which begins this chapter, blatantly conveys this. And what the revelation of such leaves, twigs, limbs and branches threaten, in *Black No More*, is the white power structures that make their claims to power based on the "natural" superiority of whiteness.

It is the question of "who's who" that lies beneath the opposition toward homogenizing practices for the critics of Black-No-More, Inc. When Max Disher transitions to Matthew Fisher in Schuyler's novel, he very easily makes his way into a position of wealth and prestige solely because the new shade of his skin permits him such access. Schuyler writes that, "The unreasoning and illogical color prejudice of most of the people with whom he was forced to associate infuriated him. He often laughed cynically when some coarse, ignorant white man voiced his opinion concerning the inferior mentality and morality of the Negroes" (43). Claims regarding the inferiority of intellect or morals assume this degradation based solely on the color of skin. When this demarcation of otherness is removed, any claims to "natural" superiority are lost. Max slides easily into Matthew, and simply into the white world of money and power. He quickly becomes the "Grand Giraw" of the Knights of Nordica, when he locates "Rev. Henry Givens, Imperial Grand Wizard," from a newspaper ad calling for "10,000 Atlanta White Men and Women to Join in the Fight for White Race Integrity," as "The racial integrity of the Caucasian Race is being threatened by the activities of a scientific black Beelzebub in New York" (45). Ironically, as the first customer of the "scientific black Beelezebub" in New York, Max poses as a prominent anthropologist and joins the Knights. Max merely has to *state* that he is a prominent anthropologist, and no other questions are asked. Not knowing what an anthropologist even is, Max's status is acceptable and believable to his white audience merely because of the appearance of his skin, which serves as any and all prerequisites or credentials.

Faces, in *Black No More*, guarantee nothing. In Schulyer's novel, Dr. Crookman's project of making the world white eventually evidences the lie of the possibility of pure visual or genealogical distinction. As Black-No-More gains success and turns almost all citizens into white-appearing ones, a campaign is on to vote in the leader of the white Supremacist group, the Knights of Nordica, as President of the United States. Part of his platform involves the legalization of genealogical testing; but in the process of researching this, the leaders of the Supremacist group are revealed to have either genealogical non-white lineage or indeterminable lineage. Arthur Snobbcraft, President of the Anglo-Saxon Association of America, discovers (through statistics generated by his own organization) that, according to Buggerie, the statistician:

> It is true that your people descended from King Alfred, but he has scores, perhaps hundreds of thousands of descendants. Some are, of course, honored and respected citizens, cultured aristocrats who are a credit to the country; but most of them, my dear, dear Snobbcraft, are in what you call the lower orders: that is to say, laboring people, convicts, prostitutes, and that sort. One of your maternal ancestors in the late seventeenth century was the offspring of an English serving maid and a black slave. This woman in turn had a daughter by the plantation owner. This daughter was married to a former indentured slave. Their children were all white and you are one of their direct descendants! (143)

Likewise, Henry Givens, leader of the Knights of Nordica, is "only four generations removed from a mulatto ancestor" (143).[8] Sara Ahmed, in proposing a queering of genealogy itself, suggests that, "genealogy itself is mixed. When genealogy straightens itself up, when it establishes its line, we have simply lost sight of this mix" (143). Much like the concealed mixed

trees within the lineages of Schuyler's optically white citizens, genealogy is all but a chart composed of straight lines; the lines deviate and prove in constant contact with bodies that do not constitute the graphically mapped family tree. The whitest of white citizens, preaching the dogma of white superiority and racial integrity, turn out not to be "pure" after all. Their genealogy proves mixed, and the surfaces of their bodies prove not to carry the signs of that mixing. Their faces have always been read as white, and the revelation of mixed genealogy also reveals that their faces are not, after all, legible; histories of contact are not evidenced and readable on the surface, speaking of or for themselves. Purity is a lie, as is the line that might guarantee one's origin as a solitary, isolated point of non-contact.

Making Material Lines

The medical technologies implemented in *Black No More* have a number of similarities to the motivations of the plastic surgery industry and/or patients of "ethnic" plastic surgery, in that both seek to erase those signs which have been deemed markers of distinguishable racial "otherness." While the industry itself surely does not challenge the validity of these markers, the characters and plotline of *Black No More* contest the notion of many of those markers themselves as delineable, other than skin color itself. The whitening process is the "chromatic emancipation" (62) of the black U.S. population. When asked how the chromatic emancipation will work in conjunction with less alterable features, such as dialect, Crookman responds that:

> There is no such thing as Negro dialect, except in literature and drama. It is a well-known fact that among informed persons that a Negro from a given section speaks the some dialect as his white neighbors. In the South you can't tell over the telephone whether you are talking to a white man or a Negro. The same is true in New York when a Northern Negro speaks into the receiver. I have noticed

> the same thing in the hills of West Virginia and Tennessee. The educated Hatitian speaks the purest French and the Jamaican Negro sounds exactly like an Englishman. There are no racial or color dialects; only sectional dialects. (14)

Here Schuyler challenges the notion that a dialect "belongs" to any one or any race; rather, the argument that Crookman makes here is that language is a product of culture, proximity, and contact. Language and dialect are not inherent to any race (or any one person) but are intimately tied to the communities and contact between "selves" and "others" that create those communities. Crookman then continues, addressing the other facial "markers" that supposedly designate and delineate otherness: "Well, there are plenty of Caucasians who have lips quite as thick and noses quite as broad as any of us. As a matter of fact there has been considerable exaggeration about the contrast between Caucasian and Negro features. The cartoonists and minstrel men have been responsible for it very largely" (15). What is contested here is the singularity with which "ethnic" features are understood, as well as the exemption of these markers from the touch of culture. The features that supposedly distinguish "otherness" are in part coded to signify otherness through the cultural work of "cartoonists and minstrel men" who produce and reiterate the meanings of such facial parts. Neal A. Lester writes that,

> Even late nineteenth- and twentieth-century minstrel and plantation songs written by whites mockingly imitating blacks for the entertainment of whites include details of 'nappy, kinky, or wooly' hair as a common tactic for ridiculing blacks. For instance, Sidney D. Mitchell's 'Mammy's Chocolate Soldier' (1918) includes the line: 'Come and lay your kinky head on Mammy's shoulder'; Clarence Williams's 'Ugly Chile (You're Some Pretty Doll)' (1918) includes the line: 'Your hair is nappy, who's your pappy'; and Sam M. Lewis's 'Underneath the

> Cotton Moon' (1913) includes the line: 'You's ma little black boy wid a turned up nose, / An' a little bunch o' wool upon yo' head / . . . You's ma little bit o' wooly headed brown-eyed gal.' (206)

The numerous examples provided by Lester illustrate the legitimacy of Schuyler's claim that bodily features – here, hair in particular – were often stabilized as signifiers through cultural performances (including, but not limited to, those of minstrel men) of those features as indicators of coherent and readable visual distinction. Predominantly white constructions[9] of black bodily features, cultural productions rendered the black body (supposedly) readable through the reiteration of meaning attributed to physical characteristics such as hair.[10]

Bernadette Wegenstein has suggested that the face – and its overcoded meanings – has become "obsolete," and that taking the place of the face is overcoded body parts. In conjunction with Deleuze and Guattari, she suggests that the body has been dismembered, and that parts have taken the place of the overcoded face. Yet Wegenstein does not suggest the possibility that various facial features – the individual parts of the face itself – have themselves become overcoded, and that in this sense, the face has very much *not* become obsolete. Parts, rather than the whole face, remain overcoded both in Schuyler's examination of race as well as in the context of plastic surgery. As Haiken has noted, Jewish nose surgeries that took place during the first years that plastic surgery began to blossom in the United States were largely comprised of women who did not want to carry the "signs" of their Jewishness; but it was also significantly sought out by those women who claimed that, while they did not possess Jewish ancestry, wanted nose jobs because they *looked* Jewish – because they were asked if they were Jewish, or believed their nose "looked Jewish." This is significant, especially in considering Schuyler's rejection of the parts of the face as necessarily "distinguishable," as those who were not Jewish

possessed facial parts that fell in line with attributes specifically affiliated with Jewish women. This significantly demonstrates the somewhat arbitrary nature of the coding of facial features in connection with race.

As has been noted, Junius Crookman's business, Black-No-More, receives a good deal of unanticipated negative attention. Both Crookman and the narrator express surprise in this matter. In their eyes, the practice should be widely accepted, since according to them, Crookman's medical technology takes care of the "race problem." Black-No-More comes under fire due to its making the "pure whites" indistinguishable from "others." The company threatens to destroy those "laboriously established lines" that define self and other, black and white. The clinging to notions of purity – the desire to round up those who wish to defend that supposed purity – is not merely a claim to, and defense of, purity; it is also a claim to, and defense of, power. The destruction of such a laboriously established line threatens to obliterate not only those claims to purity, but also threatens to obliterate those essentialisms which delineate between human beings based on pigmentation. If one can gain access to wealth and power merely through access to whiteness, then there is nothing inherently superior about whiteness – contrary to what those in power within (and outside of) the novel might wish to maintain. The opponents of Crookman's business stand against the practices that parallel that of the cosmetic surgery industry because many believe that the whitening of faces jeopardizes what is believed to be an entitlement to power reserved for whiteness. This at least partly motivates the strong reaction and resentment toward the dissipation of a line dividing and demarcating between the superior and the inferior, the white and the black. Schuyler's *Black No More* comments on the issue of (in)distinguishability and racial supremacy most poignantly at the close of the novel. As Black-No-More, Inc. has so rapidly altered the skin colors of U.S. citizens, thus destroying the

color line which has so laboriously been established, a new line is established in its place. In a hilariously ironic turn, the powerful decide that those who have received the Black-No-More treatment will appear a whiter shade of white, and so thus it becomes favorable not to be "too white":

> In the last days of the Goosie administration, the Surgeon-General of the United States, Dr. Junius Crookman, published a monograph on the differences in skin pigmentation of the real whites and those he had made white by the Black-No-More process. In it he declared, to the consternation of many Americans, that in practically every instance the new Caucasians were from two to three shades lighter than the old Caucasians, and that approximately one-sixth of the population were in the first group [. . .] To a society that had been taught to venerate whiteness for over three hundred years, this announcement was rather staggering. What was the world coming to, if the blacks were whiter than the whites? Many people in the upper class began to look askance at their very pale complexions. If it were true that extreme whiteness was evidence of the possession of Negro blood, of having once been a member of a pariah class, then surely it were well not to be so white! (177)

The artificiality of these lines demonstrates both the malleability and the unstable nature of these lines, posing a challenge to their "naturalness," and evidencing the human hands that are behind its making. Even after it has been publicly announced that the whitest of white men – those claiming pure genealogies – have been proven to have mixed ancestry, the same kind of line is again erected. The purest white stock in *Black No More*, we learn, have "black branches" in their "family trees," and faces, it proves, can no longer be made to seem pure, or possess

distinguishable features. Indistinguishability threatens the clarity of those lines, and also rearranges the social and material world. These material effects and social rearrangements are evidenced in a number of ways, including the space that Max Disher/Matthew Fisher feels walking through Times Square after his Black-No-More treatment, and his ability to quickly rise into wealth and power. But such rearrangements of the social become particularly clear when Schuyler writes that, following the wide implementation of the Black-No-More treatment:

> Real estate owners who had never dreamed of making repairs on their tumble-down property when it was occupied by docile Negroes, were having to tear down, re-build and alter to suit white tenants. Shacks and drygoods boxes that had once sufficed as schools for Negro children, had now to be condemned and abandoned as unsuitable for occupation by white youth. Whereas thousands of school teachers had received thirty and forty dollars a month because of their Negro ancestry, the various cities and countries of the Southland were now forced to pay the standard salaries prevailing elsewhere. (103)

The opponents of Black-No-More, Inc., are concerned over the indistinguishability of difference – over the lack of capacity to distinguish "one" from "the other" – because it jeopardizes their supposed entitlements to property, education, decent housing, and fair wages. This passage also emphasizes, quite strikingly, those "synonyms" of whiteness that, at least in part, motivated (and continue to motivate) "ethnic" surgeries, or the use of whitening products. Again, this is not to suggest that the cosmetic surgery industry (or Crookman's industry) should not be critiqued; after all, Junius Crook-man's name is not unintentional, and the "apparatus" in which the Black-No-More treatment takes place is described as "a cross between a dentist's chair and an electric chair" (16). While there is undoubtedly violence that occurs in the homogenizing practices of

both Crookman and the cosmetic surgical industry, Schuyler challenges us to approach the opponents of Black-No-More and examine the racist ideologies that motivate, at least in some instances, opposition to "whitening." Again, this is not to elide the important critiques of racist ideologies that motivate or promote whitening/homogenization procedures, which continue to uphold politically aesthetic ideals of whiteness; yet it is to suggest that, in addition to what we critique about those who support such procedures and aesthetic ideals, we must also pay attention to the political motivations behind those who proclaim opposition to homogenizing practices, where we might also see the persistence of mythologies of purity and originary separation between bodies.

Black No More aims to make evident the lies and mythologies of pure origin. It also suggests that genealogy as a straight and pure line is another of such myths. In part, Schuyler's text partakes in a project of "queer vision," as his text works to make visible the unreadability and illegibility of the visible world, and suggests that there are no trees that grow without the branches of "otherness." There is no pure "one" and no pure "other," but only the desire to maintain such fictions of separation and non-contact in order to insure the maintenance of (white) power. As a Georgia Senator in Schuyler's novel states: "yuh caint preach that white supremacy stuff ve'y effectively when they haint no niggahs" (105).

The Violent Assertion of Lines

Arthur Snobbcraft, the President of the Anglo-Saxon Association in *Black No More* – whose genealogy is eventually proven to be of mixed descent, as a result of his own plot to establish ancestry and distinguish between "pure" black and white – is described as a man whose passions in life always revolved around two issues: "white racial integrity and Anglo-Saxon supremacy" (120). After it is revealed publicly that such a figure is in fact of mixed descent,

Snobbcraft flees New York in an effort to escape public persecution or violence. Dr. Buggerie, the statistician and scientist whose work uncovered histories of mixing in the "pure stock" he believed both himself and Snobbcraft to be, accompanies him in his flight, along with the pilot of the aircraft on which they depart. But the aircraft runs out of gas before the men have reached their destination, and are forced to land preemptively in Mississippi. Before touching down in the South, the men express growing concern over their impending landing, believing that – when they venture out to retrieve gasoline – they may be recognized from their very public exposure of "impure" roots. Buggerie suggests that, "you know real niggers are scarce now and nobody would think of bothering a couple of them, even in Mississippi. They'd probably be a curiosity" (163). In order to disguise themselves, they rub shoe polish over themselves, covering their faces and limbs. Yet the men do not know the circumstances which precede their arrival, nor the dynamics of the community that they approach. Schuyler describes Happy Hill, Mississippi, the town where the men have landed:

> Long before the United States had rid themselves of their Negroes through the good but unsolicited offices of Dr. Junius Crookman, Happy Hill had not only rid itself of what few Negroes had resided in its vicinity but of all itinerant blackamoors who lucklessly came through the place. Ever since the Civil War when the proud and courageous forefathers of the Caucasian inhabitants had vigorously resisted all efforts to draft them into the Confederate Army, there had been a sign nailed over the general store and post office reading, NIGER REDE & RUN. IF U CAN'T REDE, RUN ENEYHOWE. The literate denizens of Happy Hill would sometimes stand off and spell out the words with the pride that usually accompanies erudition. (165)

Unaware of the conditions of Happy Hill, the men enter a community which has rid itself of "the race problem" through lynching. In addition to these dynamics of Happy Hill, the present moment of their arrival leaves them unknowingly the bearers of a sign for a burgeoning new faith. Rev. Alex McPhule, recently attempting to convert believers to his new religion, has been ardently praying for a sign – a sign with which to gain the admiration and devotion of the Happy Hill community. Residents of Happy Hill, downtrodden in the loss of supposed pure distinguishability, mourn their inability to no longer carry out lynchings: "Sage old fellows frequently remarked between expectorations of tobacco juice that the only Negro problem in Happy Hill was the difficulty of getting hold of a sufficient number of the Sons or Daughters of Ham to lighten the dullness of the place. Quite naturally the news that all Negroes had disappeared […] had been received with sincere regret" (165). In praying, Rev. Alex McPhule has begged God for a sign that will speak to the weary hearts of the community. The reverend prays specifically for the sign that is eventually to be taken as the presence of Snobbcraft and Buggerie in Happy Hill: "If the Lord would only send him a nigger for his congregation to lynch! That would, indeed, be marked evidence of the power of Rev. Alex McPhule" (168). When the inhabitants of the town discover that there are two men who appear black about Happy Hill, they are quick to praise God for sending a sign, and fast to make spectacle of a ceremonial, and long-desired, lynching. With the community residents feeling cheated, the two men wipe off their shoe polish to reveal the white pigmentation of their skin, momentarily saving them from being lynched. But after Snobbcraft and Buggerie have washed up, they are again at risk of being lynched, as news of their ancestry has reached Happy Hill and its residents joyfully realize that the lynching can take place rightfully after all.

The community's desperate desire to enact such ceremonial and violent killings again reveal the desire for maintenance of black subjugation and white power. Christine Harold and Kevin Michael DeLuca suggest that, "Arguably, the regime of Jim Crow was the second act of the Civil War, a war over the meaning of black bodies continued by other means. Blacks were now 'free' which, for many whites, made them all the more necessary to control and subordinate. Lynching was the most violent instrument of control" (267). They continue that, "Under Jim Crow, lynched black bodies were offered as evidence of white supremacy [...] Lynched black bodies were spectacles of white supremacy that helped forge white community. They were also messages of warning and terror for black communities (268). The desperation of Happy Hill, and its intense longing to lynch, serves as a way of both fostering white community against an "other," as well as threatening black bodies with appropriate lines that are unacceptable to cross. Lynching serves as a way of, very literally and violently, controlling and immobilizing the movement of black bodies.

The community slides easily from wanting to lynch bodies they read as being "pure" black, to the bodies of Snobbcraft and Buggerie, who have been widely exposed for their black and mulatto ancestors. The reassertion of their own "purity" comes through the destruction of the body that challenges those notions of purity. By immobilizing these bodies then, histories of contact and violence can again be elided, in the name of fostering a community that bases itself around imagined racial integrity. As Harold and DeLuca suggest, it was not uncommon for those individuals chosen to be lynched by a white community be substituted for another: "Lynchings served as a kind of racial terrorism, anchoring white supremacy in a mutilated black body. Often any black body would do [...] When a white mob near Columbus, Mississippi, was frustrated in its efforts to find and lynch Cordelia Stevenson's son, for example, they 'settled on

his mother, seized and tortured her, and left her naked body hanging from the limb of a tree for public viewing.' Often, the pretext of an accusation was not even necessary" (269). A different kind of substitution occurs when Snobbcraft and Buggerie are first about to be lynched, and when their identities are revealed and they are then lynched as a result. The nature of the crime (being Black) at once differs and remains the same. The consolidation of white community around the mutilation of the black body, and the assertion of hegemonic, uncontested power, remains the same. Snobbcraft and Buggerie remain the targets of lynching due to their impurity. The community reasserts this impurity as "other," as outside of themselves, in executing a lynching that violently performs and asserts that there are pure racial lines, that histories of contact and mixing are outside of, and other than, themselves. The actions of Happy Hill residents reflect both fears of, and a desire to efface, reminders or representations (and bodies themselves) that contest that purity, those lines. Community is re-forged against "an other" that threatens infiltration, and the illegibility of the body – specifically, the face – itself. That community is also forged through the immobilizing of a body that threatens the stability of the white power structure, which relies on concepts of purity in order to sustain itself. Immobilization and legibility function in tandem, and I will turn now to Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, a text which negotiates questions of both stasis (or immobility) and the (un)readability of bodily and object surfaces. Ellison's text suggests how we might consider immobility and legibility to be objectives of a similar ideological vision – similar ways of seeing, and confronting, "the Other."

Immobility and (Il)legibility in *Invisible Man*

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, published in 1952, takes place in the 1930s, and traces the protagonist's experiences in the South through his departure, and into his life in New York City.

The novel begins and ends in a Harlem manhole, where the Invisible Man, also the narrator of the text, resides, stealing electricity from the Monopolated Light & Power Company. Shortly after the protagonist arrives in New York City, he is briefly employed at a paint company, a job which ends in an explosion and the narrator's subsequent hospitalization. Thereafter, he encounters Mary, a kind stranger who offers him hospitality and becomes his landlord. His struggle to make ends meet leads the narrator to accept a position with the Brotherhood, a Communist organization who ultimately seeks the presence of the Invisible Man as a tool of propaganda for the furthering of their racist agenda. Riots in Harlem eventually ensue as a result, in part, of the Brotherhood's initiatives, and it is during the riots that the Invisible Man finds himself in the manhole in which the story both begins and ends. As we are taken through the many steps of the Invisible Man, Ellison's text continually negotiates questions of visibility, history, labor, and the face.

Throughout the plot of *Invisible Man*, the protagonist repeatedly learns that his blackness precedes him, that his hyper-visibility leads to his invisibility. He also continually encounters others who believe in both the possibility of his legibility and the desire to make him legible, shore him up, make him intelligible through stereotypes of blackness. The violent ways of seeing that permeate Ellison's novel become apparent in the first chapter of the novel, at the scene of the "Battle Royal," which precedes the protagonists' entering college, and his subsequent departure to New York. The narrator arrives at the Battle Royal expecting to make a speech about his education. But his speech is preceded by a scene of spectacular humiliation – during which the narrator is made to enter a boxing ring in which he blindfoldedly fights other blindfolded black men for the viewing pleasures of a white audience. These same black men are further made into objects of entertainment and humiliation as they grab after gold coins (which

turn out to be worthless imitations) on a rug that, they realize, is electrified. The colonizing and degrading gaze of white onlookers demonstrates the violent vision being exercised, and this violent vision continues to haunt the pages of *Invisible Man*.

The violence exerted upon these bodies leads up to the narrator's eventual opportunity to speak formally, and the "mistake" of language he makes during this speech elucidates the violence that precedes, follows, and is enacted within this moment. As the narrator uses the phrase "social equality" – instead of "social responsibility" – in his speech, the white crowd erupts in displeasure and correction. The narrator disavows his own statement out of protection, stating that this mistake occurred because he was "swallowing blood." The MC responds, "Well, you had better speak more slowly so we can understand. We mean to do right by you, but you've got to know your place at all times" (31). These become the dominant and repeated words and phrases – in many other words, and many other phrases – that suggest that the narrator can only "move" if he "stays in his place."[11] The narrator discovers at this point in the novel that he will be given a scholarship for college, and the men give him a briefcase as a gift. While these white men offer to "do right by" him, they expect him to live up to his end of the bargain: which is to "stay put." The desire for immobility and legibility emerge as simultaneous desires of the multiple people the protagonist encounters.

As with the "wave" of immigration and the migration of large black populations to urban northern spaces between the 1910s and 1930s in the US, mobility and movement are intimately connected to concepts and supposed threats of illegibility. Fears over a changing national body and a shifting "face of the nation," prompted discourses of legibility, expressing concerns over the growing illegibility of the national body/face. Thus legibility is rhetorically connected to mobility and movement. If bodies, whether individual or national, could remain still, the

components that make up that body could also remain mappable, structuring the desire for immobilized bodies. With movement also comes the threat of illegibility. Yet such narratives of otherness, that pose an impending or present threat of emergent illegibility, suggest that the body retains an originary space of non-contact, in which immobility and legibility are both possible in some once-possessed and isolated space of the readable. *Invisible Man* suggests that this legibility and immobility remain always already impossible, since the protagonist is always moving, even when immobilized. Ellison also develops a narrative that reflects on the deep violences that proceed from a vision that seeks to make legible and immobile, a vision that, in wanting to retain the readable, annihilates "the Other."

Moving Objects

Throughout *Invisible Man*, many objects move, and their movements often pertain to the novel's larger reflections on (im)mobility, legibility, and race. One of the moving objects encountered by the Invisible Man is presented after he has been working some time for the Communist organization, the Brotherhood, that he has joined. Another black member of the Brotherhood, Brother Tarp, enters the office of the narrator and offers him a gift, a chainlink he had filed in order to escape his white oppressors years earlier. Brother Tarp tells the narrator that he wants to pass it on to him because, "I think it's got a heap of signifying wrapped up in it and it might help you remember what we're really fighting against. I don't think of it in terms of but two words, *yes* and *no*, but it signifies a heap more" (388). The narrator looks over the artifact and suggests that it "bore the marks of haste and violence, looking as though it had been attacked and conquered before it stubbornly yielded" (389). Here the narrator anthropomorphizes the object, as it is described in a way in which it both acts and is acted upon; it is attacked, conquered, and yields.

Brother Westrum, another member of the Brotherhood, enters the narrator's office after Tarp passes along his object to the narrator. Westrum notices the chain link and asks what the object is. As he picks it up, the object becomes even more human, as the narrator refers to it as "strangely skinlike now" (392). The narrator informs Westrum that it was a personal gift from a Brotherhood member (Tarp) who spent nineteen years under the hand of white oppressors. Westrum "recoiled" at this, and suggests: "I don't think we ought to have such things around [. . .] Because I don't think we ought to dramatize our differences" (392). The narrator states that he is not dramatizing, but simply has an article of property on his desk. Westrum repugnantly asserts, "But people can see it!" The narrator responds that "I think it's a good reminder of what our movement is fighting against." But Westrum vehemently disagrees with the narrator on this point, suggesting rather that this object is, "the worst kind of thing for the Brotherhood—because we want to make folks think of the things we have in common. That's what makes for Brotherhood. We have to change this way we have of always talking about how different we are. In the Brotherhood we are all Brothers [. . .] Things that don't make for Brotherhood have to be rooted out" (392-393). What Westrum objects to primarily is the visibility of the object. Westrum makes this objection on the basis that it makes visible differences, and recalls a history within its display which contradicts the claim to sameness which the Brotherhood promotes. Westrum's claim that it is a dramatizing of difference suggests that the ideal of sameness – of "Brotherhood" – is threatened by the presence of objects which disrupt that very surface. Whatever then threatens that sameness – or rather, that appearance of sameness, a legible and coherent surface – is constructed as a threat to the constitution of that identity (in this case, "Brotherhood"). The object must be hidden, repressed, to deny the histories of (violent) contact recalled in the object. For these reasons, Westrum's objection to the visibility of the object that

threatens false stability or sameness (in that it threatens to make visible that very falseness) must be kept invisible. The fact that "people can see it!" means that the history the object recalls, and the fallacious stability it jeopardizes, must be "rooted out."

The chainlink recalls histories of contact, of violence and oppression, and also represents the transition and migration of Tarp himself. Fleeing from white oppressors in the South, Tarp has come North. His migration is also recalled in the movement of the object, and this migratory body threatens the desire of white ideology to keep him in stasis, in physical subjection, physical immobility. While Tarp, of course, does not escape all forms of subjection in his move northward, it is the removal and the movement of the chainlink that poses a threat to the white power structure that demands his immobility. Tarp's reading of the chainlink, that it signifies more than *yes* or *no*, suggests that the chainlink does not symbolize the linear movement from subjection to freedom. The object, for Tarp, bears much more complexity, and recalls histories of violent contact that do not merely recede into a demarcated past, but continue to remind him of what he is fighting for/against. Tarp's relationship to the chainlink suggests that he does not wish to forget his past, but rather seeks to *remember the arrival of the object*. This recollection of the arrival of the object threatens the surface of sameness promulgated by the Brotherhood. In displaying an object that once guaranteed physical subjection, its movement northward and its presence on a desk, rather than on a black body, presents a danger to "Brotherhood" that must be hidden, invisible.

The chainlink is not, in fact, the first moving object encountered in Ellison's text. Previous to this occasion, the narrator encounters a coin bank at his Harlem home with Mary, the stranger who offers him assistance in his early days after moving to the North. Before the

narrator departs Mary's apartment, and moves to his locale outside of Harlem by Brotherhood direction to do so, he notices something he had not previously:

> The cast-iron figure of a very black, red-lipped and wide-mouthed Negro, whose white eyes stared up at me from the floor, his face an enormous grin, his single large black hand held palm up before his chest. It was a bank, a piece of early Americana, the kind of bank which, if a coin is placed in the hand and a lever pressed upon the back, will raise its arm and flip the coin into the grinning mouth. For a second I stopped, feeling hate charging within me, then dashed over and grabbed it, suddenly as enraged by the tolerance or lack of discrimination, or whatever, that allowed Mary to keep such a self-mocking image around, as by the knocking. In my hand its expression seemed more of a strangulation than a grin. It was choking, filled to the throat with coins. (319)

At first the coin bank seems to merely be an object which resembles a person, through the description of an object that bears lips, grin, palm, chest. But the facial characteristics of the object also seem to come to life, as its expression takes on one of strangulation rather than a grin, and the personification is implied through describing the object as "choking, filled to the throat with coins." The narrator sees the object, at least in part, as something which feels and expresses – the object itself seems to experience oppression. Thing theorist Bill Brown writes, "Things quicken," and that, "the inanimate object-world slowly but certainly wakes" (175). Brown performs an analysis of the world of things, and does so through his analysis of the phenomenon of the "Jolly Nigger Bank," particularly during and following the era of Reconstruction in America. He utilizes Marx in order to address the place of the uncanny, and he detaches this understanding of the uncanny from the Freudian/Oedipal understanding of the term. Brown

suggests that Marx's concept of capital depends upon the transforming of things into people (reanimation) and people into things (reification); he uses Marx's framework to suggest a further point, which is that particular objects may recall, or make visible, that transformation. The uncanny is the place of confusion or uncertainty between animated and animator, between subject and object. In this specific analysis, Brown suggests that the "Jolly Nigger Bank" recalls the history of slavery in this way, as it is a history of turning people into things; but he also suggests that, in the time of and wake of the Reconstruction, these objects were a means of symbolically keeping the image of blackness in stasis and in the place of object rather than subject:

> Whereas the minstrel show animates the stereotype of the 'plantation darky,' these objects might be said to deanimate it, to arrest the stereotype, to render it in three-dimensional stasis, to fix a demeaning and/or romanticizing racism with the fortitude of solid form [. . .] The fixity of the stereotype, rendered in ceramic or iron or aluminum, compensates for the new heterogeneity of black America; the nostalgic embodiment of some fantasmatic past compensates for uncertainties about the future place and role of African Americans in the U.S. [. . .] American racial typology proves to be a convenient way, throughout the West, of securing such allotemporal stability. (185)

These iron, ceramic, and aluminum depictions of the black body function, Brown argues, as a memorialization of an imagined past, in which black bodies were stable, singular, and monolithic, nothing more than the stereotypes generated by white culture. The solid form provided by such objects also reflects a longing to see black bodies as if they were literally in chains, under physical subjection, as Brother Tarp had once been. When the protagonist breaks

the coin bank, it is an assertion of both his mobility and illegibility: "Then came a crash of sound and I felt the iron head crumble and fly apart in my hand" (320). He destroys an object that functions as a symbolic arrestation of movement, and as such refuses to be tricked by a white ideology that asks him to see himself in the coin bank, to recognize himself as the stereotype rendered inanimate and immobile in solid form.

Michael A. Ervin discusses the use of statistics and maps in order to make natural resources and populations legible. He suggests that mapping of geographical bodies and populations aims to make these bodies, "'visible to the state.'" Ervin suggests that, "The result is what James Scott calls 'maps of legibility,' which make a land's natural and human resources known or 'legible' to officials" (156). While such cartographies of bodies might be useful to the state, they also, Ervin suggests, exercise domination and violence. These grids of intelligibility and readability bear significance for Ellison's *Invisible Man*, in that he continually struggles against the imposition of the mapping of his own face, body, and identity. Ervin continues to convey how "maps of legibility" can work as mechanisms of subjection: "While some maps of legibility might be considered neutral representations of existing realities, scholars have focused on their generation of new realities and relationships of subordination. Maps of legibility enable and legitimize state authority over territory through warfare, trade, and colonialism" (156). The narrator suggests an awareness of the powers that wish to map him, to dominate and colonize him through his subjugation to classification, and through the making readable of his body and his face. When Ellison's narrator attends a Brotherhood party, Emma, a white woman, asks Brother Jack, the leader of the Brotherhood, if the narrator shouldn't be "a little blacker" (303). The protagonist reflects on her inquiry, and thinks to himself that, "Maybe she wants to see me sweat coal, tar, ink, shoe polish, graphite. What was I, a man or a natural resource?" (303). The

narrator's question about his status as "natural resource" suggests that he is aware of the powers that wish to measure him, that wish to assert authority over him through the subjugation of his body to "maps of legibility." He rejects the possibility of this mapping, which aims to keep him immobilized, and hence chartable, readable, and mappable.

Invisible Histories

Through the many reflections on history that permeate Ellison's novel, the Invisible Man demonstrates a growing critical analysis of both history and visibility, and their relationship to one another. Some of the most pivotal meditations on history undergone by the protagonist occurs in the wake of the death of Tod Clifton, a former member of the Brotherhood who had chosen to leave, peddling Sambo Dolls on the street. When the narrator witnesses the murder of Tod Clifton by a police officer, he is compelled by his witnessing to interrogate the Brotherhood's beliefs about history, that it is "scientific."[12] Propelled by the questions raised by his friend's death, the narrator reflects:

> I stood there with the trains plunging in and out, throwing blue sparks. What did they ever think of us transitory ones? Ones such as I had been before I found Brotherhood – birds of passage who were too obscure for learned classification, too silent for the most sensitive of recorders of sound; of natures too ambiguous for the most ambiguous words, and too distant from the centers of historical decision to sign or even to applaud the signers of historical documents? [. . .] Why did he [Clifton] choose to plunge into nothingness, into the void of faceless faces, of soundless voices, lying outside history? I tried to step away and look at it from a distance of words read in books, half-remembered. For history records the patterns of men's lives, they say: Who slept with whom and with what results;

> who fought and who won and who lived to lie about it afterwards. All things, it is said, are duly recorded – all things of importance, that is. But not quite, for actually it is only the known, the seen, the heard and only those events that the recorder regards as important that are put down, those lies his keepers keep their power by. (439)

As opposed to abiding by the ideology of the Brotherhood, the narrator now adopts a new position on history. Although the narrator still fears the fate suffered by Clifton, he begins to make assertions about what is not so "scientific" in the recording of history, as is evidenced in the preceding passage. The narrator begins to acknowledge history not as something which is scientific and disciplined in the way that the Brotherhood professes, but rather that its recordings are a method of disciplining, of lying to keep power in the hands of those who are its recorders. He also suggests that it is not only the design of those in power, but that it is only the heard, seen, and known that are recorded in the writing of history. Thus the unknowable, inaudible, and invisible are not recorded in the writing of history. Here Ellison draws our attention to the invisible contact that shapes bodies. The record of history is a way of making events, time, and space legible, creating a cleanly narrative which expels abject materials and material contact in order to create a readable, and meaningful narrative.

The narrator suggests that surfaces do not evidence histories of contact, as he was somehow able to "miss" the existence of boys he observes while standing on the subway platform. We will see this again in relationship to the character of Rinehart, as the possibility of "missing" – of the gaps, and, in subway lingo, of watching those gaps, in the recording of history. He also raises the question of classificatory systems of organization, and suggests that despite the appearance of the possibility of properly classifying, that organization is never wholly

encompassing. The appearance of form and organization, in both history and identity, is always the lie to cover and make legible bodies that cannot ever truly possess that legibility. As opposed to the narrator's previous attempts to fit into the "organization" of Brotherhood which demands his invisibility, here Ellison's protagonist refuses the organization offered in the philosophies of Brotherhood; rather than professing a belief in all as classifiable, as "scientific" in nature, he affirms rather the nature of those who are "too ambiguous for the most ambiguous words." The narrator's faith in the discipline and organization of both history and language dissipates in this moment of affirmation. Even the most ambiguous of words cannot capture the ambiguity that lies beneath, between, and even *on* the surface; even the most ambiguous of words cannot capture the "gaps"; even the most ambiguous of words cannot account for the illegibilities of the body. As the narrator expresses, the makers of history in *Invisible Man* are held in the hands of the Brotherhood. And thus their narrative in regard to the life and death of Clifton, as he comes to find out, is that of "traitor." The narrator's refusal to accept this notion spurs him on to organizing a massive public funeral for Clifton, during which he speaks and memorializes Clifton not as a traitor, but as a black man gunned down by a white, racist police officer. This action outside of the approval of the Brotherhood provokes a verbal attack on the narrator by the members of the Brotherhood, who berate him for acting outside of their accord; he must, at all times, remember to keep his "appropriate" place.

Another revelation the narrator encounters while standing on a subway platform observing the comings and goings of people around him, is his reflection on these "men out of time" (441). He muses on the bodies he sees, stating that, "These fellows whose bodies seemed – what had one of my teachers said of me? – 'You're like one of these African sculptures, distorted in the interest of a design.' Well, what design and whose?" (440). These men are "men

of transition whose faces were immobile" (440). The faces the narrator describes as "immobile" are not in and of themselves immobile; it is that they are made to appear immobile, "in the interest of a design." George Yancy describes "the trick of white ideology; it is to give the appearance of fixity, where the 'look of the white subject interpellates the black subject as inferior, which, in turn, bars the black subject from seeing him/herself without the internalization of the white gaze' (Weheliye 2005, 422). On this core, it is white bodies that are deemed agential. They configure 'passive' Black bodies according to their will" (216-217). The comparison the narrator recalls, that of his face to an African sculpture, resonates with Brown's language regarding the ceramic or iron fixity of a stereotype. The fact that the narrator recognizes immobility of the face as that which is part of a design, of which he questions *what* and *whose*, makes apparent his recognition that legibility is merely the trick of white ideology, configuring these bodies and faces as passive, immobile, and readable. While the men the narrator sees are "in transition," their faces are rendered immobile and readable only through the violent imposition of white ideological vision. This does not, however, provoke a final cessation of their movement, as they remain in states of transition, and thus in states of dynamic motility. His reflection does, though, suggest the violent imposition of such vision that wishes to shore up, to keep in solid readable form.

Behold, the Invisible

I would like to turn now to Rinehart, a character who demands we acknowledge the material contact occurring within "gaps" or voids. Those sounds and words, those spaces which go under the radar of intelligibility, are not meaningless voids, empty gulfs, gaps of nothingness, but instead are filled with sounds, words, and bodies, even when those sounds, words, and bodies are not audible or visible. When Ras, the leader of a Black Nationalist group in Harlem, and his

men, present a danger to Ellison's narrator, the protagonist disguises himself in order to escape their pursuit of him, and to grant himself safety. The narrator dons sunglasses and a hat that lead to a confusion of identity. As the narrator plunges into and through the streets of Harlem, time and again he is mistaken for a character by the name of Rinehart (whose "real" presence we never encounter). We do, however, encounter various people throughout Harlem who "recognize" Rinehart (the narrator), and we discover via the narrator the multiple faces that Rinehart wears – he is a pimp, a bookie, a zoot-suiter, a reverend. The narrator develops a particular fascination with the guises that Rinehart evidently dons, and a world which the narrator does not previously acknowledge as existing is opened. Upon encountering children passing out handbills on the streets of Harlem, the narrator reads the leaflet they distribute:

> Behold the Invisible
>
> Thy will be done O Lord!
>
> I See all, Know all, Tell all, Cure all.
>
> You shall see the unknown wonders.
>
> -Rev. B.P. RINEHART,
>
> *Spiritual Technologist*
>
> (495)

Ellison's text continually and complexly reflects on issues of visibility and invisibility; throughout the text, there are multiple moments in which the narrator suggests his own not-being-seen (this, of course, is suggested in the title of the novel), but also through tropes of blindness that raise questions of who can be or is a see-er. At this juncture, the importance of Rinehart's advertisement to "Behold the Invisible" must not be neglected in its relationship to the thematic of (in)visibility. The pamphlet continues, and specifically repeats this call: "Come to

the way station. BEHOLD THE INVISIBLE!" (495); "BEHOLD THE SEEN UNSEEN / BEHOLD THE INVISIBLE / YE WHO ARE WEARY COME HOME!" (496) This call to behold that which cannot be evidenced in the visible world of course references God in this context, but to see this only as such is an oversimplification of the significance this bears in reference to the figure of Rinehart. Despite the spiritual reference to God, the "Invisible" which the narrator (and others) are called to behold is structured to refer to Rinehart himself. The "Lord" is referenced as "Thy," and thus is referred to in the second person; the line that follows – "I See all, Know all, Tell all, Cure all" – moves to the first person, and it is then given that the one who sees, knows, tells and cures is not God but the spiritual technologist himself, Rinehart. Thus when we return to the first command, to behold the invisible, the beholding is not necessarily the invisible as God, but the Invisible as Rinehart himself (or at least, what it is that Rinehart performs), and the material contact he has made with other people, other bodies. And it is this performance, and contact, that crowds (and readers) are called to behold. We as readers, and the narrator whose trek we witness, never in fact encounter Rinehart; rather, we (and he) encounter(s) Rinehart as an invisible figure. It is his work we witness, rather than the invisible man (not the narrator here, but Rinehart) himself. In a sense, the narrator then heeds his call, as do we, as it is his performances of self, rather than any stable or identifiable self, that are encountered. Thus the "seen unseen" is confronted. This is important in the sense that this also speaks to the concept of a vision which seeks to see not the unseen itself, but the material effects of the invisible. After encountering the handbills and church affiliates who believe the narrator to be Rinehart, the narrator leaves the scene mystified:

> Can it be, I thought, can it actually be? And I knew that it was. I had heard of it before but I'd never come so close. Still, could he be all of them: Rine the runner

> and Rine the gambler and Rine the briber and Rine the lover and Rinehart the Reverend? Could he himself be both rind and heart? What is real anyway? But how could I doubt it? He was a broad man, a man of parts who got around. Rinehart the rounder. It was true as I was true. His world was possibility and he knew it. He was years ahead of me and I was a fool. I must have been crazy and blind. The world in which we lived was without boundaries. A vast seething, hot world of fluidity, and Rine the rascal was at home [. . .] Perhaps, I thought, the whole thing should roll off me like drops of water rolling off Jack's glass eye. I should search out the proper political classification, label Rinehart and his situation and quickly forget it [. . .] It couldn't be, but it is. And it can be, is, simply because it's unknown. Jack wouldn't dream of such a possibility, nor Tobitt, who thinks he's so close. (498)

For the narrator, Rinehart represents possibility, and motility. The protagonist encounters all of Rinehart's acquaintances as he is literally walking through the streets of Harlem. As the protagonist unknowingly steps into Rinehart's shoes, he traces a path that echoes the movements of Rinehart himself, running into multiple people who have come to be familiar with his presence. The narrator moves, walks through unfamiliar streets of Harlem, and replicates the mobile experience of Rinehart. And Rinehart's mobility refuses classification, mapping, as those the narrator encounters continue to overlap and contradict his names and designations. Kevin Bell suggests that Rinehart represents one of the narrator's moments of revelation, which refuses to accept his body or self as immobile: "Charging a self that no longer thinks in terms of its immobilized re-presentation but only in terms of reaching and surpassing its own experiential/experimental borders of imagining and satisfying its own aesthetic contours" (30).

Bell argues that the thematic of jazz in Ellison's novel emerges in such moments of the protagonists' realizations about selfhood, experiment, self-stylization, and movements. Such movements, and identity itself, become unmappable in the Invisible Man's confrontation with the figure of Rinehart.

It is also through Rinehart that the narrator begins to see the material effects of invisible contact. The Invisible Man never actually sees Rinehart, and hence Rinehart is also an invisible man. Yet he continues to witness the effects of the contact that this invisible man, Rinehart, has made with other bodies. In this recognition, the protagonist also begins to see a world with its barriers down; vast, hot, and seething, the world begins, for the narrator, to take on flesh. The narrator suggests that the proper Brotherhood response would be to "locate" the "proper" classification for such an identity as that of Rinehart. Yet he does not do so. In Ellison's *Shadow and Act*, he describes Rinehart as the "name for the personification of chaos" (181). This is important in many respects, as the issue of chaos plagues *Invisible Man*. We encounter passages which reflect on chaos in varying ways throughout the course of the novel, and this reaches an apex when we encounter Rinehart.

In the early stages of the narrator's journey, he takes Mr. Norton – the wealthy white benefactor of the college the narrator attends in the South – on a car ride which leads to the sharecropper Trueblood, who is known locally for his impregnating of his wife and daughter around the same time. After the Mr. Norton hears Trueblood's story of incest, he incredulously states: "You have looked upon chaos and are not destroyed!" (51) The references to chaos continue when the narrator is forced to stop at the Golden Day with Mr. Norton in order to revive him from a fainting spell following the exchange with Trueblood. The Golden Day seems the embodiment of chaos, confusion, and madness. And when the incident at the Golden Day results

in the narrator's expulsion from college, he departs with a further reflection on chaos as he looks back upon the organization of the school: "I turned and watched it recede from the rear window; the sun caught its treetops, bathed its low-set buildings and ordered grounds. Then it was gone . . . lost within the wild uncultivated countryside" (156). The emphasis on the departure from the confines of organization into the "wild" and "uncultivated" resonates strongly with what the narrator finds again later in the "taming" provided by the Brotherhood.[13] The Brotherhood offers the narrator the same kind of structure offered by the landscaping of the college which he departs; it offers him refuge from the wild and uncultivated chaos of the Golden Day, and of the chaos embodied in the life and story of Trueblood. The Brotherhood offers the narrator the lie of stability, order, and legibility in both history and identity. Rinehart disrupts this belief in such lies, purities, histories; Rinehart pierces the surface of the invisible, and enters the world "seen unseen." Rinehart, and his world, are in a constant and compulsive state of fluctuation, eruption, transition, migration, change; he is anything but static.

Joseph F. Trimmer explores the possible "solutions" the narrator encounters to the "riddle" of his grandfather's deathbed words.[14] In the case of Rinehart, Trimmer argues that Rinehart does not offer a solution for the narrator because, "adopting Rinehart's methodology leads to the destruction of Harlem and the betrayal of his people" (49). In donning disguises, Trimmer suggests, and performing as multiple persons with different occupations, he is ultimately only, and simply, a con man. Trimmer continues, stating that, "there are even deeper implications in the example of Rinehart. As Olderman points out, 'behind Rinehart's many masks, behind the Invisible Man, there is no identity.' Or as Earl H. Rovit has suggested, Rinehartism is the 'wholesale exploitation of and surrender to chaos'" (49). The problem with Trimmer's analysis of Rinehart is that it fails to consider the impossibility of not-deceiving.

When identity is believed to be stable and fixed, it is also then believed that there is a possibility of its fully coherent and truthful revelation – to either oneself or to others. This analysis suggests that the face can ultimately be made wholly readable, legible, and that Rinehart's illegibility functions as a betrayal. Yet this can only work as betrayal under the presupposition that there exists a prior space of non-contact. Rinehart's identity is shaped by the various forms of contact he makes with the world, and with other bodies. For Rinehart not to "betray" in this formulation, he must be able to reveal himself for himself, as himself, a priori, outside of the contact he makes that shapes him.

The possibility the narrator sees in uncovering Rinehart bespeak of the opening upon unknowable and undetermined futurities of self. The suggestion that there is no identity behind the many masks articulates a conception of identity which relies on something which is unchanging and unalterable, something which remains in sameness through space and time. This position continues to insist upon immobilized representation. Bell writes that, "In his [Rinehart's] inability to be identified under a stable code of referentiality, he performs the substance of movement, recognizable only by fragmentary accoutrements such as dark, green-lensed sunglasses, knob-toed shoes, and a Cadillac that rolls only by night" (31). It is precisely the movement which again firmly denied in the above passage from Trimmer's analysis of "the grandfather's riddle." The demand to cease movement, to "stay in his place" is forcibly imposed on the mobility of Rinehart – the performance of "the substance of movement" is chalked up to a deception of form. And Rinehart is, most certainly, a deception of form; but the suggestion that there is a possibility of a "truthful form" resonates with the ceramic and cast-iron of the sculpture or the mechanical bank, and the dangerous violence implicit therein is evident in the demand for the arrestation of motion, a violent annihilation.

It is important that the narrator states that Brother Jack couldn't dream of the possibility of Rinehart. For Brother Jack, a "Rinehart" represents a void, a gap, an only-ever unseen. This is also the case in Brother Jack's view of Harlem. Both can only be voids, because to acknowledge, to see, to "watch the gap," would mean to disrupt his system of organization, which conveniently is rife with the lies that keep him in power. Rinehart is the gibberish-speaker, the vast seething hot world of fluidity, the penultimate faceless face of ambiguity, and therefore his existence, to Jack, must remain denied and banished from the visible and historical world he professes. In his "deceptiveness" and transitoriness, he is not available for Jack's taming practices of language, image, and form. He is subject only to his own composition, which is ongoing and unstable, constantly in a state of transformation – an opening upon worlds of possibilities and multiple futurities – flesh composing with the flesh of the world,[15] the jazz of flesh.

Underground Contact

The narrator's rejection of his immobilized representation is evident in his meditations from the manhole. Realizing the many representations that have preceded and marked his body without his consent, the narrator refuses the categorizations imposed on him by the social. Likewise, he refuses the stabilizing notions of race that aim to keep him "in his place," and proceeds to create motion and electricity even in the manhole – a habitation that should, by all means, force his stasis and keep him in his place, underground. The Invisible Man rejects the social lines that have been mapped for him, stating that

> I started out with my share of optimism. I believed in hard work and progress and action, but now, after first being 'for' society and then 'against' it, I assign myself no rank or any limit, and such an attitude is very much against the trend of the

> times. But my world has become one of infinite possibilities [. . .] Until some gang succeeds in putting the world in a strait jacket, its definition is possibility. Step outside the narrow borders of what men call reality and you step into chaos – ask Rinehart, he's a master of it – or imagination. (576)

The narrator writes of confinement, restricted movement, in the image of the straightjacket; and the figure of Rinehart symbolizes the world of infinite possibilities which lies within the finite and observable world; the realm of invisibility is rife with activity and contact. The narrator suggests that upon crossing the fictitious boundaries of what are called "reality," one enters the world of chaos (Rinehartism), and in such a world, there is no place for "rank" or "limit" to be assigned. The narrator comes to a realization of his own continually altering body, that falls outside the "ranks" or "limits" of how a body must be, or how a body must appear. He writes that, "In going underground, I whipped it all except the mind, the *mind*. And the mind that has conceived a plan of living must never lose sight of the chaos against which that pattern was conceived. That goes for societies as well as for individuals. Thus, having tried to give pattern to the chaos which lives within the pattern of your certainties, I must come out, I must emerge" (580-81). Ellison's narrator reflects on his reasons for writing, and so in this implicitly reflects on the simultaneity of possibility and impossibility, visibility and invisibility. The narrator speaks from a void; he is in a hole, and he is an Invisible Man. And yet we read the record of a history that speaks of and from that void, that hole, that invisibility; and we are thus caught in a turbulent position, which is both paradoxical and not so, both the impossibility and possibility of creating the "music of invisibility."[16]

What Ellison's Invisible Man ultimately argues for is the acknowledgement of invisibility, and with it the acknowledgement of chaos that lies within the patterns created by the

mind to give order to that chaos. With this false surface of order and control over chaos, the narrator also implies that legibility is merely a surface, and that illegibility – unintelligibility – lies at the heart of being in the world. It is my argument that the pleas for these acknowledgements are not separate but intimately connected – necessarily overlapping, intertwining, crisscrossing. The Invisible Man calls for us to recognize that within form there is always masked an invisible – an invisible history, an invisible body, an invisible ambiguity (too ambiguous for the most ambiguous of words), and an invisibility of *the process by which these bodies, in their ambiguities and illegibilities, are made invisible*. And thus the narrator gives himself a name – after long last, after being named and named again by others; and his name of choice is the Invisible Man: "I have also been called one thing and then another while no one really wished to hear what I called myself. So after years of trying to adopt the opinions of others I finally rebelled. I am an *invisible* man" (573). And thus we are called again to behold the invisible, and to witness the invisibility of the performance executed in order to secure the visibility of what the Brother-Jack's of society want to remain seen and unseen. Kevin Bell suggests that, for the Invisible Man,

> The verbal 'I' is a strategy of self-implication into that legislative configuration of power, whose force inheres primarily in its ability to designate and name, to determine and to place [. . .] the verbal reconstitution of an idealized self-coherence that is always already shattered by the mobile experience of living thought [. . .] A continual migration that, as the Invisible Man recognizes in the stolen light of his stolen cellar, can never identify any proper destination or way as being one's 'own.' (Bell, 26-7)

Thus identity for the Invisible Man is refused in his renaming himself the Invisible Man. Identity is refused because the Invisible Man recognizes the impossibility of living in or of the legibility prescribed by power. He realizes that his search for stable self is a falsely impossible search, as the body is in continual migration. The body, continually in contact with the world, cannot ever attain the coherence that, to use Yancy's term, "white ideology" seeks to force upon black bodies. The narrator refuses to be sculpted, to be the product of another's design, and embraces the possibility and mobility of movement in making the "self," movements which deny the prospect of making one's body/self wholly coherent or legible. The Invisible Man calls for a recognition of the invisibility of invisibility; he does *not* call one to behold something which can be made visible (as he remains, until the close of the novel, still an Invisible Man), but calls readers to acknowledge invisibility and the mechanisms of power which create and foster those invisibilities for the sake of sustaining such power. Yet those forms still hold the possibility of speaking *of* the void – or rather, voids.

To speak of the voids is not to claim to *speak the voids.* To see the fullness of "voids" is to exercise a particularly queer look, as with the bringing forth Tarp's chainlink, and allowing it to rest on the desk of the Invisible Man, in plain sight. It is to look for the violence and exploitation that rests not only in past but in present, against powers which aim to extinguish and to deanimate these remembrances in the name of "sameness" – in the name of an always already lie of stability and purity. It is to speak of the migrating bodies and identities – be they individual, racial, national, global – which are punished in their migration. It is to speak of the void which allows us to see not the unseen, but to see that there *is* an unseen, and that the disacknowledgement of the unseen (and its materiality, its material contact) is by no means an accident, but a product of multiplicitous violent histories and presents that fix, strangle, and put

in a “straight jacket.” But *Invisible Man* also demonstrates that voids cannot ever be voids, since they are full, and full of motion and contact. Douglas Ford, for instance, asserts that electricity in Ellison’s novel represents a struggle between dominant and resistant powers. He suggests that while the “white world” thrives on electricity, the “blues network” witnessed by and through the Invisible Man do not thrive off electricity, but rather see the potential for creating new intersections of power. Ford discusses the last lines of *Invisible Man*, which picture the protagonist writing from his hole in the ground, and stealing electricity from the Monopolated Light and Power Company. Ford writes that the narrator, at this juncture, “intimates that his voice can speak for us, and by playing on the ‘lower frequencies’ he becomes a form of networked consciousness, one that substitutes openness for the closed circuitry of monopolized power. Ultimately, no network remains impenetrable, the novel suggests—even those networks designed to maintain the invisibility of an entire population” (901). Even as the Invisible Man is underground, he is making contact with the world, writing his story, and meanwhile stealing electricity from the Monopolated Light & Power Company. Even as he is underground, literally below the surface of the visible, he is in motion, networking electricity and language.

Optic White

While Ellison’s novel consistently offers us narratives of vision that ask us to confront the motion and materiality of the invisible, an episode early after the protagonist migrates northward affords a particularly striking metaphor in which I argue we should reconceive of embodiment and legibility, and this metaphor functions as emblematic of the many concerns with (in)visibility and surfaces confronted in *Invisible Man*. Following on the heels of the narrator’s arrival to New York City from the South, he finds employment at a paint factory. In a text that continues to negotiate visibility and visuality, the Invisible Man begins to observe the

many optical illusions at play in the production of both whiteness and "smooth" surfaces at Liberty Paints, in the "Optic White" the company manufactures. Upon first approaching Liberty Paints, the narrator reads the electric sign, "KEEP AMERICA PURE WITH LIBERTY PAINTS" (196). America's purity, as evidenced in the work taking place within the confines of this building, is a matter of painted histories, effaced contact between bodies.

In the narrator's one and only day working for Liberty Paints, he begins the hours with one boss and ends with another. Upon his arrival, he is quickly directed to begin work under the supervision of a Mr. Kimbro, who instructs him on the process of making "Optic White" paint. Using a dropper to remove liquid from one container into another, he is told to "stir it 'til it disappears" (200), and then paint a sample to verify the color appears as it should, "Optic White." Optic White is the specialty color of Liberty Paints, and a great deal of the shade is sold, Kimbro points out, to the government. But the narrator grows concerned about the contents being utilized to produce "Optic White." The narrator states that, "when I looked into the white graduate I hesitated; the liquid inside was dead black. Was he trying to kid me?" (200). Expressing his confusion, the narrator asks Kimbro if he is aware of the (black) color of the liquid, and Kimbro responds by telling the narrator to do what he is told. As Kimbro guides him through the process, the narrator describes the adding of drops: "Slowly, I measured the glistening black drops, seeing them settle upon the surface and become blacker still, spreading suddenly out to the edges" (200). Yet as the stirring continues, the black dissipates, and the paint becomes, in the words of Kimbro, "as white as George Washington's Sunday-go-to-meetin' wig and as sound as the all-mighty dollar [. . .] That's paint that'll cover just about anything!" (201-202). The narrator concurs with the evaluation of the paint's hue, and Kimbro continues: "White! It's the purest white that can be found. Nobody makes a paint any whiter. This batch right here

is heading for a national monument!" (202). The histories of mixing, of contact, and of blackness itself disappear in the concoction of a paint that can not only covers just about anything, but is significantly, also, headed for a national monument.

The narrator continues with his work, but makes a mistake shortly thereafter that costs him a transfer to another supervisor, and to the basement of Liberty Paints. The narrator's new superior, Lucius Brockway, is an older black man and long-time employee of Liberty Paints. Lucius boasts of his indisposability to the company, the necessary work he performs, which no one can seem to replicate up to the standard that Brockway has set. Though the company has sought replacements, they have always returned to Lucius. Upon arriving to the basement, the narrator expresses confusion about what tasks are being executed by Brockway. He muses on the nature of his work, and determines, "No, he was *making* something down here, something that had to do with paint, and probably something too filthy and dangerous for white men to be willing to do even for money" (212). The toxicity of this environment highlights the labor that is involved in producing an outward appearance of the pure; as Lucius points out to the narrator, "*we the machines inside the machine*" (217). Brockway explains to the narrator that Optic White is the product that has made the company successful, and upon the narrator's question as to why white, as opposed to other colors, Lucius responds: "'Cause we started stressing it from the first. We make the best white paint in the world, I don't give a damn what nobody says. Our white is so white you can paint a chunka coal and you'd have to crack it open with a sledge hammer to prove it wasn't white clear through!'" (217).

Like Schuyler's *Black No More*, histories of contact and mixing do not necessarily appear on the surfaces of bodies and objects. But mixing and contact are revealed in the basement of Liberty Paints, in the exposure of that very mixing and contact. The visuality involved in this

scenario is of great importance. This paint, the supposed purest of white paints, is in fact not pure white – despite that fact that it has been made to appear as though it is. This speaks to the labor that becomes invisible on the surfaces of bodies and objects themselves, and also reveals the labor involved in the production of false and violent concepts of purity – which in turn promulgates and rationalizes violence done in the name of preserving or protecting that purity. But let me return at this time to the idea of labor as it pertains to this segment of Ellison's work. The unspeakable toxicity of the environment in which Lucius works speaks to the violence done to his body within the context of the necessary labor he performs. In order to produce "Optic White," then, "blackness" must stand as a signifying "otherness" so that claims to purity can be maintained. And there is a necessary labor which goes into producing these concepts of purity and self/otherness; this is the labor which does violence to bodies which do not appear "Optic White."

In Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* she develops a Marxian framework to discuss how we can rethink objects "not only in history, but as an effect of history" (40), and suggests that history, "cannot be perceived on the surface of the object, even if how objects surface or take shape is an effect of such histories" (41). Ahmed points out that, though some evidences of (histories of) contact may be visible, and that surfaces change shape as a result of a body or object "getting there," this of course does not mean that all work is evidenced in the "having got there." Ahmed urges us to consider the physical labor which goes into the production of an object. In this sense, the production of the paint must be considered in the layers of its complexity. The invisible labor which goes into the production of Optic White is also the violent and exploitative toxicity of the work involved in its production – which may bespeak also of slavery in the United States, and this again correlates to the desire to make invisible Brother

Tarp's chainlink. The economic profit made from the violent enslavement of bodies for the "benefit" of "Optic White" also enters this embedded image. This Optic White paint, at least some of which, Ellison reveals to us, will be used for national monuments, is created from a (black) base which is then made invisible. Mullen notes that the production of Optic White paint at Liberty Paints suggests the collaboration and conflict that negates, refuses narratives of purity that insist on prior spaces of non-contact:

> The American myth may rely for its potency on the interdependent myths of white purity and white superiority, but the invisible ones whose cultural and genetic contributions are covered up by Liberty White, those who function as machines inside the machine, know that no pure product of America, including the linguistic, cultural, and genetic heritage of its people, has emerged without being influenced by over three hundred years of multiracial collaboration and conflict. (74)

Mullen's analysis of the mixing processes at Liberty Paints suggests that what emerges in Ellison's description of the production of Optic White are histories of conflict, collaboration, and contact between bodies. Bodily contact in both labor and violence are ongoing, material, and while this contact may not appear on the surface, spaces of untouched and isolated bodies are counteracted with the imagery and metaphor offered here. The invisibility of human exploitation in the name of creating a monument covered in Optic White is connected to the invisible labor of making a white that appears pure, the whitest of whites, free of contamination or "mixing." Much like the white faces of the "purest whites" in Schuyler's *Black No More*, histories of mixing, contact and violence are not visible on the surface. Histories of labor and mixing are effaced to produce a smooth surface, pure white.

We might also consider the monument itself further. Although there are monuments which may serve to remember the dead, or recall history, monuments – particularly national monuments – work to both foster feelings of national solidarity and/or to honor or celebrate those figures deemed both significant and "good." Ellison's text cannot but call to mind the Lincoln Memorial. Instead of memorializing the death of countless Black bodies, the monument is dedicated to the remembering of the man who brought "Brotherhood," solidarity. This is the moment that can be re-remembered, because it memorializes both a white (and pure) history. Like the Optic White paint itself, histories of mixing, violence, contact, and labor reside in the "basement"; the monument bears only the coating of pure white. And mixing is not only beneath the surface; it is within it.

Reading Surfaces Queerly

In the eleventh chapter of *Invisible Man*, the narrator wakes up in a hospital after an explosion that occurs while he is working in the paint factory. Coming out of a state of semi-consciousness, he grapples with the fragments of speech he hears from the medical staff surrounding him. He states that "some of it sounded like a discussion of history" (236). This statement is followed by an ellipses, but he grasps the words (which are connected and disconnected by the ellipsis), "The machine will produce the results of a prefrontal lobotomy without the negative effects of the knife." If we take "history" to be precisely *a machine* that *will produce the results of a prefrontal lobotomy without the negative effects of the knife*, then the scars of history are hidden. As I have noted, this project is invested in fostering what I call a queer look, or a queer vision, in conjunction with Kelly Oliver's conception of a "look of love," and Sara Ahmed's discussion of "histories of arrival" and "histories of contact" that are not available on the surfaces of objects or bodies. Oliver suggests that there is materiality in contact,

even when that materiality remains invisible, and Ahmed similarly proposes that histories of contact are not always available to the eye, even though history does shape what appears or what surfaces. It is of extraordinary importance to note that I do not mean to suggest that all scars can be made visible; rather, the invisibility of scars – and the often violent histories that accompany their erasure – must be acknowledged in a queer looking or reading of surfaces.

Ellison's imagery of the paint mixture, and his metaphor of history, both foster ways of seeing that refuse the verticality of straight, self-evident, and legible surfaces. In looking queerly at objects and history, Ellison's Invisible Man asks us to expose the machine, expose the lobotomy, and *expose the invisibility of the scars of the knife/knives which have done so much violence – not only in scarification, but in the process of making that scar invisible*. Ellison's metaphors call us to acknowledge the materiality of histories of contact, even when signs of that contact are not visible, and in doing so, offers us a very queer look, a queer vision, of objects; this queer look refuses the presupposition that bodies and objects are, or can be made, legible surfaces, and asks us to remember invisible arrivals that involve violence and contact. Ellison's text asks us to recall the illegibilities and histories of contact which are denied in the making of stable, mappable identities, both individual and national. This passage of *Invisible Man* speaks not only to the specificity of the situation in which Ellison's narrator finds himself, but also more largely to a history of U.S. scarification which has been plastered over with the kinds of bandages which seek to erase the scars of violence. Such narratives, which insist on originary spaces of non-contact, insist that the stability of the "pure" and the "singular" are at risk of being overtaken, contaminated, submerged, by those (non-white) bodies which do not remain in apparent fixity. This is why the mobility of the *Invisible Man* must always be kept in check; it is why he must always "know his place." This is also why objects such as Tarp's chainlink must

be banished from the visible world for a character such as Westrum. The object troubles the singular, "scientific" story of history, and threatens the stability of the Brotherhood – and, more generally speaking, "brotherhood" in the U.S. The forgetting of the scar, the invisibility of the scar, operates in a similar way as the banishment of the object which challenges the "sameness" of the Brotherhood and, particularly in language that permeates contemporary depictions of the United States as a multicultural haven, at once insists on the elimination of the scars that did, and do, persist in order to create a concept of singular nationhood, and also demands the evidence of banishment of human difference for the sake of the "one."

I would like to close this chapter by tying Ahmed's concepts of lines (as genealogical lines are but one of the many ways in which Ahmed discusses lines) with the epilogue of *Invisible Man*. In one of the final scenes of Ellison's novel, the narrator sees Mr. Norton, with whom the narrator previously shared the calamitous encounter at the Golden Day. Upon realizing that Norton was lost, the protagonist reflects that, "Perhaps to lose a sense of *where* you are implies the danger of losing a sense of *who* you are. That must be it, I thought – to lose your direction is to lose your face. So here he comes to ask his direction from the lost, the invisible. Very well, I've learned to live without direction. Let him ask" (577). And, for the narrator – as he informs a fleeing Norton – all trains go to the Golden Day (578), a place that symbolizes chaos. Lines, and/or direction, like other forms the narrator of *Invisible Man* contemplates, can also operate as formations of resistance. Ahmed suggests that direction is not a "casual matter," but rather is "organized" (15), that "within the concept of direction is a concept of 'straightness.' To follow a line might be a way of becoming straight, by not deviating at any point" (16). The Invisible Man thus refuses this line, refusing to take up a "direction." Ahmed continues that, "For a life to count as a good life, then it must return the debt of its life by taking on the direction

promised as a social good, which means imagining one's futurity in terms of reaching certain points along a life course. A queer life might be one that fails to make such gestures of return" (21). Despite the narrator's assertion, "I must come out, I must emerge" (581), he does not "succeed" in emerging. I would like to suggest that this "failure" to "return" is not a passive and socially apathetic resignation. The narrator's "failure," rather, suggests a deviant direction, as the narrator articulates that this – *Invisible Man* – is an endeavor produced in and of his state of hibernation. The narrator claims he lives "without direction," and in this sense space and time are queered, as he refuses the promise of the direction ("stay in your place at all times") given him by his social world. In his refusal to "assign rank or limit" to himself, he "fails" to give the meaning of his body or self over to the regimes of power who name him, who wish to shore him up and make him legible. In this sense, we could talk about the time and directionality of the closing to *Invisible Man* as a time and direction which are queer, and which speak to the possibility of creating new lines, perhaps in the lines between the black and white of "the music of invisibility,"[17] unknowable futurities which make no definitive return to the futurities inscribed in the "social skin" of the Invisible Man's social world. *Invisible Man* presents, then, a queer tale of embodiment, wherein the narrator resists the straight, cartographical, instructive lines that are so forcibly imposed on him by the white world that wishes him to remain stable, and signify difference solidly and monolithically. The narrator refuses the meaning that dominant forces aim to give to his body, and asserts the motion and migration that ongoingly informs the contours taken by the body and the self.

Schuyler's text, in many ways, performs a very queer practice; it queers genealogy, evidencing the "sight" that has been "lost sight of" in the making straight of its lines. And it proposes that "face values," quite literally, are created and malleable, while still showing that

such constructions have very material effects on the way that the social is arranged. This queer practice corresponds to what I have called a practice in queer vision, as it refuses the ideology of vision that suggests that surfaces have distinguishable, delineable features. The text also demonstrates that the idea of a once-legible surface or face operates out of an imaginary that wishes to sustain its own power, destroying the imagined purity of "naturally" straight lines, or "naturally" distinguishing features. If queer vision is invested in those extinguished traces of arrivals that counteract moments of distinguishability, *Black No More* partakes in such a project. The bodies in Schuyler's text are all illegible. And Schuyler also presents the violences done in the name of protecting purity, and protecting from illegibility. Lines are artificially created – socially constructed, an effect of both labor and contact – but the ways in which those fabricated lines effect material bodies and social arrangements are all but imaginary.

These two texts offer us interruptive depictions of embodiment and identity that can help foster less violent ways of seeing that are engendered in dominant conceptions of the body and the self. These novels suggest that I cannot shore up "the other" and make him readable before me – since he cannot be readable before me, and because to attempt to make him so exercises a violence. The paint mixture of *Invisible Man* gives us another metaphor by which to understand our contact with others, and how that contact might not be visible on the surface. It insists that there is labor that goes into the effacing of that contact, contact which has material effects on material bodies, even when that contact is erased, hidden, denied. The paint mixture confronted by the Invisible Man reminds us of the illegibility of all surfaces, since not all contact takes visible shape (on the surface) or bears the signs of that contact (on the surface). To turn towards the labor that is necessary to produce "Optic White" is a refusal to avert our eyes from the force that the invisible has on shaping the contours of bodies. Schuyler's novel exercises a practice in

what Ahmed calls “mixed genealogy,” attempting to acknowledge the concealment that occurs in the creation of a conventional family tree.

In presenting these mixed genealogies – Schuyler’s family trees and Ellison’s paint mixtures – the authors re-imagine the relationship to between self and other – not as bodies which can be isolated in a pure, and prior space of non-contact, but as entrenched always already in making contact. To be aware of this contact, even when invisible, perhaps can lead us to a more loving look, a look that acknowledges the vulnerability of bodies and the interdependence that comes in making contact. Schuyler’s and Ellison’s work also cultivate an awareness, and this awareness acknowledges contact between bodies, especially when that contact is violent, even if (or especially when) that violent contact is erased, effaced, or simply does not come to the surface (or mark the surface) – even if (or especially when) that contact is invisible.

Describing the face as “the ultimate fetish” (146), Slavoj Zizek writes that, “the true ethical step is the one *beyond* the face of the other, the one of *suspending* the hold of the face, the one of choosing *against* the face,” that “the limitation of our capacity to relate to Others’ faces is the mark of our very finitude” (184-85). In opposition to Levinas’ proposition that ethical responsibility toward the other comes in the moment of face-to-face recognition, Zizek suggests that the recognition of this face is all but possible, asking “What if, along these lines, we restore to the Levinasian ‘face’ all its monstrosity: face is not a harmonious Whole of the dazzling epiphany of a human face’” (162). Zizek suggests that the temptation is to domesticate the unknowable and unrecognizable Otherness of faces, which becomes “the reduction of the radically ambiguous monstrosity of the Neighbor-Thing into an Other as the abyssal point from which the call of ethical responsibility emanates” (162). This temptation, he suggests, is to be resisted; this reduction to legibility – the assumption that one’s face can be read, and his

otherness possessed, establishes a violent annihilation. These texts advocate this suspension of knowing, a look that embraces the illegibility of being in the world, that desires to resist this desire for recognition, this desire to make legible; this look can only happen when it is recognized that the Other, and his face, are illegible, and when the desire to make that Other and his face legible, no longer fills the look.

Reflecting on her ancestry, Sara Ahmed suggests that, "Color wasn't just something added, like a tan on white skin, as it redirected my attention to the skin, to how the surfaces of bodies as well as objects are shaped by histories of contact" (151). But those histories of contact, Ahmed argues, are not always visible; they "cannot simply be perceived" (153). Both individual and national bodies are often understood as possessing an *a priori* identity, in a space of non-contact where an entity can assert itself as itself, outside of its contact with objects and others. Yet such spaces can only ever be fictional. Mixing and contact are always-already, continuous and ongoing happenings. We look to genealogy as a grounding of purity, and as a story of origin. But there is always already mixing in the family tree; that mixing, that contact, has merely been concealed. Histories (of contact) simply cannot be perceived on the (sur)face of objects, bodies, or genealogy itself. George Schuyler and Ralph Ellison confront the concealment of mixing and contact, and contest the notion that surfaces are readable and legible. They ask us to reconsider the readability of surfaces, and expose the violence of negating the invisible contact from which we tend, so often, to avert our eyes. Both Ellison and Schuyler contest dominant narratives of vision, by creating narratives that counteract the belief in the capacity to read surfaces, and by implicating the violence that is enacted in the desire for making that surface readable. These authors create worlds in which readers are confronted with the way that both bodies and objects might be read, and are thus invited to read surfaces queerly, as readers are prompted to

reevaluate how they see, or read, within the text itself. Through the queer readings of bodies and objects that are implemented in these texts, we might reconsider our own reading practices towards others, and the bodies of those others, whom we approach or confront, acknowledging the violence of the desire for, and belief in the possibility of, the ultimately legibility of "the Other."

Chapter 2
Narratives of Isolation & Fleshly Commerce:
Abjection, Illegibility, Interzonality, and Contact in William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*

The Word is divided into units which be all in one piece and should be so taken, but the pieces can be had in any order being tied up back and forth in and out fore and aft like an innaresting sex arrangement. This book spill off the page in all directions, kaleidoscope of vistas, medley of tunes and street noises, farts and riot yipes and the slamming steel shutters of commerce, screams of pain and pathos and screams plain pathic, copulating cats and outraged squawk of the displaced Bull-head, prophetic mutterings of *brujo* in nutmeg trance, snapping necks and screaming mandrakes, sigh of orgasm, heroin silent as the dawn in thirsty cells, Radio Cairo screaming like a berserk tobacco auction, and flutes of Ramadan fanning the sick junky like a gentle lush worker in the gray subway dawn, feeling with delicate fingers for the green folding crackle.

– William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 191

Where then lies the border, the initial phantasmatic limit that establishes the clean and proper self of the speaking and/or social being?

– Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 85

For Julia Kristeva, the intolerable, or abject, body leaks wastes and fluids, in violation of the desire and hope for the "clean and proper" body, thus making the boundaries and limitations of our selfhood ambiguous, and indicating our physical wasting and ultimate death. In her view, human and animal wastes such as feces, urine, vomit, tears, and saliva are repulsive because they test the notion of the self/other split upon which subjectivity depends. The skin of milk, for instance, puts one in mind of the thin skin membrane that defines the borders and the limits of the physical body; because human skin provides only a relatively flimsy and easily assaulted partition between the body's inside and the world outside, this milky reminder disturbs our distinctions between outside and inside, I and other, moving us to retch, and want to vomit in an acute attempt to expel the scum from our being [. . .] The abject body repeatedly violates its own borders, and disrupts the wish for physical self-control and social propriety. We disavow our excretory bodies because they are signs of disorder, reminders of the body's ambiguous limits (its leaking from multiple orifices), and its ultimate death.

– Deborah Caslav Covino,
Amending the Abject Body: Aesthetic Makeovers in Medicine and Culture, 17

A Straight John at Last

A male hustler in *Naked Lunch* delivers a monologue representative of a dilemma faced by many of William S. Burroughs' characters: "I am fucking this citizen so I think, 'A straight John at last'; but he comes to a climax and turns himself into some kinda awful crab" (105).

Like most of the figures we encounter in this text, the male hustler is subject to dramatic self-alterity. While the John may appear "straight," his climax (and implied emission of fluids) reveals that the John is always already at a threshold between himself and becoming other than himself, always subject to transformation and mutation that leave him anything but simply a "straight John." The John transmogrifies, becoming a different species, and it is through contact in *Naked Lunch* that all bodies are vulnerable to such ongoing and inescapable metamorphoses.

Bodies in Burroughs' text are always already opened, opening, spilling out, and these openings are negotiated through acts of consumption. Eating, waste, purchasing, marketing, and vending necessitate ongoing contact between bodies, a contact which leaves no body invulnerable, immune, or pure. In *Naked Lunch*, there is no buying or selling that doesn't incorporate the body. There is no act of consumption that does not crisscross with the flesh. The abject material and body parts that fill the pages of *Naked Lunch* offer images of consumption that refuse the erasure of fleshly contact. Street noises, farts, yipes, commerce, copulation, and orgasm, continue to spill off the page. And it is with the proliferation of such abject material, body parts, and bodily functions, that Burroughs' text negotiates questions of intelligibility. In each queerly grotesque space we enter as readers, bodies and identities can never be rendered entirely legible, since they are always subject to eating or being eaten, selling or being sold, and are thus are all, inescapably, becoming other than themselves (as with the supposed straight John who becomes an "awful crab"). Negotiations between selfhood and otherness are a recurring theme of *Naked Lunch*. Burroughs' text, written in varying states of drug addiction, withdrawal, and sobriety, continually gains and loses composure of itself, and readers experience a similarly anarchic, discombobulated attempt at making sense of the novel. It is also, as I will argue, this

unintelligibility of the text itself which offers us a means of reconceiving embodiment, and resisting dominant understandings of an isolatable body or self.

Naked Lunch, first published in the U.S. in 1962, but predominantly written during the 1950s, negotiates and contests dominant fictions of "the Other" that proliferated during the 1950s in the United States. While such narratives relied on eclipsing contact between bodies in order to assert the impending danger of "the Other" who threatened to usurp, besiege, or submerge the national body, Burroughs' text suggests that this mythology relies on a false concept of selfhood and bodies that proposes former spaces of non-contact and readability that simply do not exist. All Burroughs' characters are subject to altering their dimensions, mutating into something else, becoming other than themselves. And this transformation emanates simultaneously from within and without of the body, since the body is both in and out of itself. Being overtaken, or consumed, emerges not from the wholly inside or wholly outside, but at the orifices of the body which represent thresholds of in-betweenness, where the flesh of bodies and worlds meet.

Naked Lunch also contests notions of consumption that rely on the erasure of the contact between flesh, suggesting that buying and selling cannot persist in isolated acts of consumer choice, but rather, inevitably incorporate bodies. Narratives of isolation, as I will argue further as this chapter proceeds, are those narratives of otherness that deny the multiplicitous forms of contact that are necessarily involved with being embodied. Eating and purchasing commodities – along with the persistence of abject material so often suppressed or repressed – demonstrate the impossibility of prior spaces of non-contact between body/self and otherness. Grounded in fears of "others" that threaten to eat, waste, or eviscerate the supposed once-pure national body in the U.S., narratives of isolation insist on evacuating bodies from the equations of consumerist practices and choices, and hold tenaciously to concepts of a prior, holistic, integrated, and

coherent body. Both national and human bodies are construed as extricatable entities, removable from these commercial forms of contact as well as contact with any and all "foreign" material. *Naked Lunch* presents us with spaces of commerce that are rife with plural forms of contact, and with the violent, sexual, and commercial manifestations of contact, which works in opposition to dominant narratives of otherness that insist on isolatability of the individual or national body. I begin this argument with an analysis of Burroughs' reflections on otherness that pervade his picture of the "Interzone," and continue to propose that the negotiations of otherness that emerge repetitively in *Naked Lunch* offer us an image by which to more queerly, and less violently, understand both contact and legibility as it pertains to approaching "the Other."

Interzonal Parties & Politics of Otherness

While the settings of *Naked Lunch* are plural, and its various locales warrant interpretation, I will be focusing particularly on the invented locale Burroughs calls the Interzone, particularly because of the many places, spaces, and ways of living/experiencing embodiment, that are articulated within both the name itself – Interzone – and within how this geography is conceived in the context of Burroughs' novel. Ron Loewinsohn describes the Interzone as an arena of struggle: "Control of the city of Interzone is, like everything else in this world, unstable. It is constantly being struggled over by three factions or gangs of Bad Guys – the Liquefactionists, the Divisionists, and the Senders – all of them contending also with the lone band of Good Guys, the Factualists" (571). Thus, while the colonization, assimilation, and totalizing control of "the Other" stands as a perpetual teleological drive, the space remains contested in that one is always subject to becoming "the Other." Even the Sender himself, the ultimate marketer and consumer (as we shall see in a moment) is not immune to being consumed. Loewinsohn also states that the Interzone "represents the transitional state between

being addicted and being drug-free, that is, between being controlled from within by an invader and being self-determining" (571). Burroughs navigates through his own uncertainties in these matters. In a 1955 letter to Ginsberg, Burroughs stated that, in the novel, it was not only difficult to determine who was who, or who was on whose side, but it was difficult for Burroughs *himself* to determine whose side he, the author, was on.[18] The confusion of identity for the characters, the reader, and apparently the author himself, are reflected in many of the self/other relations that are navigated throughout the text, and within the images of self-mutating creatures that are reappearing.

Burroughs describes the political parties of Interzone, and implies (as Loewinsohn has noted) that vulnerability, struggle, and contest of power are inevitable in the structural dimensions of the Zone. Burroughs introduces the four main parties as consisting of Divisionists, Liquefactionists, Senders, and Factualists. The Divisionist party members attain control by cloning themselves and cutting off pieces of flesh which are then grown into exact replicas of themselves; "samples of themselves" are then sent out and dispersed through the Zone – "that is, one person in the world with millions of separate bodies" (137). The Liquifactionist party members desire the protoplasmic absorption of all beings into one man: " 'Just look at all those expressions, the whole beautiful protoplasmic being all exactly alike.' He dances the Liquifactionist jig" (120). Senders, who are depicted as being in the most powerful of political positions or parties, send messages to citizens using one-way telepathic control. Artists believe themselves to be creating their own work, but it is merely the regurgitation of a message sent by a Sender. The Factualists stand in resistance and objection to the philosophies of all three groups (the Liquefactionists, Divisionists, and Senders), and the ideologies that inform their rejection of

the former political parties evidences the intense reflection on otherness that recurs throughout *Naked Lunch*.

Burroughs presents the Factualist opposition to these parties through "bulletins." On the subject of replicas, the Factualist bulletin reads, "We must reject the facile solution of flooding the planet with 'desirable replicas.' It is highly doubtful if there are any desirable replicas, such creatures constituting an attempt to circumvent process and change" (140). The Factualist position regarding the replication processes utilized by Divisionists suggests that their opposition emerges from an embrace of difference, and in an opposition toward repetition of the same (an opposition, also, to dominant ideologies of legibility and coherency). The same shapes are reiterated, in a political party that desires homogenization, which should be understood as "constituting an attempt to circumvent process and change" through the replication of bodily shape. Thus the Factualists oppose this desire for supposed coherency, or legibility. This Factualist policy also makes room for difference. In terms of the continuous reflections on, and negotiations with, self/other relations in *Naked Lunch*, the opposition to the replica might also be conceived of as an opposition to reading the other as self-same, as annihilating the other through seeing them as an extension, or a replica, of oneself.

This opposition to annihilation of "the Other" through such an extension of "self" is yet more emphatic in the Factualist bulletin regarding the process of Liquefaction: "We must not reject or deny our protoplasmic core, striving at all times to maintain a maximum of flexibility without falling into the morass of liquefaction" (140). The Factualist party acknowledges the connectivity and contact between bodies in the Interzone, as they embrace their "protoplasmic core." Protoplasm – the stuff out of which cells are formed, and the material, physical basis of all life – ties bodies together through matter, through the elements, through this contact in the

betweenness of bodies. While the Factualists embrace this connectivity through fleshly makeup, they oppose this as a mechanism of extending oneself over "the Other" – annihilating "the Other" through an absorption.[19] But the acknowledgment of the protoplasmic core shared by living organisms also speaks to the flesh that makes up the body, and the flesh that makes up the world. Thus while material contact and connection between bodies is embraced, the "liquefying" of the Other by swallowing him up, by destroying his separate existence and being in the world, is rejected. The Factualist position in the bulletin addressing the Senders of the Interzone suggests that the party does not oppose telepathy itself, but how it is being utilized:

> telepathy properly used and understood could be the ultimate defense against any form of organized coercion or tyranny on the part of pressure groups or individual control addicts. We oppose, as we oppose atomic war, the use of such [telepathic] knowledge to control, coerce, debase, exploit or annihilate the individuality of another living creature. Telepathy is not, by its nature, a one-way process. To attempt to set up a one-way telepathic broadcast must be regarded as an unqualified evil. (140)

Factualist opposition to the political party of the Senders is not the contact made between bodies, but the exploitation of that contact. Significantly, though the Sender seems to hold a position of uncontested power (after all, how might one escape the closed circuit of one-way telepathic control?), he is yet both consumable and replaceable. Burroughs writes that the Sender must "send all the time. He can never receive, because . . . that means someone has feelings of his own . . . sooner or later he's got no feelings to send . . . Finally the screen goes dead . . . The sender has turned into a huge centipede" (137). The grotesque image of the centipede is also simultaneously human, as it is the Sender himself who consumes and is consumed by it. The

flesh of the body cannot maintain precise and stable dimensions because it is always already in-contact. He is sending, making (exploitative and coercive) contact,[20] and thus has no available space of total isolation, and is always already subject to self-alterity.

Intertwining in the Interzone: Worlds with Flesh

We might approach Burroughs' text usefully through the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty,[21] whose concepts of the flesh articulated in "Intertwining – The Chiasm,"[22] included in his final and posthumous publication, *The Visible and the Invisible*, might benefit a reading of the fleshliness the permeates the Interzone. Merleau-Ponty states that, "once a body-world relationship is recognized, there is a ramification of my body and a ramification of the world and a correspondence between its inside and my outside, between my inside and its outside" (136), and asks, "Where are we to put the limit between the body and the world, since the world is flesh?" (138). Merleau-Ponty refers to the interaction between bodies, visions, and the visible, as chiasmic intertwinings, where the outside is not necessarily in, and vice versa; the "out" and "in" are always already in ongoing, fleshly contact, even when not visible. Contemporary of Merleau-Ponty, Paul Schilder notes similarly that "When Freud states that on a narcissistic level only the body is present, he must be mistaken. The newborn child has a world, and probably even the embryo has. It is true that on such a primitive level the borderline between world and body will not be sharply defined, and it will be easier to see a part of the body in the world and a part of the world in the body" (123). It is specifically Merleau-Ponty's focus on the fleshliness of the world and its contact, or intertwining, with the fleshliness of the body that I wish to emphasize, and this resonates in Schilder's take on the child's contact with the world. Both articulate a particular impossibility of isolation – a contact that is full of thick flesh. Such fleshliness in interaction and intertwining with the flesh of the world continues to appear in

Naked Lunch. Bodies are themselves unstable and incoherent, altering dimensions in their contact with the world. The flesh of the body is vulnerable, exploitable, commodifiable precisely because of this contact with the flesh of the world. This condition of contact is a requisite element of embodiment. This is also emphasized in Judith Butler's reflection on autonomy and sociality, vulnerability and community:

> The body has its invariably public dimension; constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine. Given over from the start to the world of others, bearing their imprint, formed within the crucible of social life, the body is only later, and with some uncertainty, that to which I lay claim as my own. Indeed, if I seek to deny the fact that my body relates me – against my will and from the start – to others I do not choose to have in proximity to myself (the subway or the tube are excellent examples of this dimension of sociality), and if I build a notion of 'autonomy' on the basis of the denial of this sphere or a primary and unwilled physical proximity with others, then do I precisely deny the social and political conditions of my embodiment in the name of autonomy? If I am struggling for autonomy, do I not need to be struggling for something else as well, a conception of myself as invariably in community, impressed upon by others, impressing them as well, and in ways that are not always clearly delineable, in forms that are not fully predictable? (21-22)

Butler emphasizes the contact that inevitably exists between bodies. Our bodies, she suggests, both are and are not our own, because their survival is dependent upon the communities we inhabit and function interdependently, within the context of sociality and others. The human is incessantly and irrevocably in relationship to the world around the body; the body and/or the self

are constantly impressing upon and being impressed upon, experiencing contact. Our "selves" are not stable and solid entities, but rather ongoing and never fully formed formations. Maurice Merleau-Ponty argues that the human body is a place of connection rather than boundary. He argues that it is the flesh which connects us to the world around us – the "flesh of the world." The idea of the flesh as boundary is rooted in the desire to maintain a sense of stability, as well as personal or national, holistic and pure, identities. The belief in bodies as singular or isolatable formations is jeopardized in Schilder's, Merleau-Ponty's, and Butler's concepts of embodiment. And opposed to the extricated and exceptional way in which bodies are dominantly understood to exist in the world, a philosophy of intertwining demands an acknowledgment of interaction; and as such, it also demands an acknowledgement of historical intersections of violence, production, consumption, and the acknowledgment of the falsity of rhetorical narratives that insist on the possibility of pure and holistic bodies, removable and isolatable from their multiplicities of contextuality and connection to other objects and bodies. Likewise, in Burroughs' text, bodies are constantly in contact with the fleshliness of between spaces, and as such, cannot remain in constancy or a state of self-sameness, maintaining whole, total or coherent "identity." The Interzone in *Naked Lunch*, a space accessed by the traversal of the subway, bears similar dimensions of necessary fleshly contact as the subway space described by Butler – contact in these spaces are inevitable, like the breathing of air.[23]

These negotiations between self and other, inside and outside, permeate the novel, and the figure of a self-mutating figure recurs. Like the "straight John" who reveals his lack of straightness in becoming a crab, the Sender emerges in his self-alterity by transforming into a giant centipede. These mutations between species are paralleled in the description of the architecture of the Interzone. Burroughs writes that, "The Zone is a single vast building. The

rooms are made of plastic cement that bulges to accommodate people, but when too many crowd into one room there is a soft *plop* and someone squeezes through the wall right into the next house" (149). The architecture of both buildings and bodies in Burroughs are ultimately very tenuous. In the contact between bodies, they are vulnerable and in perpetual states of becoming other than themselves. Walls and objects, take on a flesh of their own, flesh that bulges and plops in interaction with the flesh of bodies. The world, in the Interzone, quite literally takes on flesh. The negotiations between self and other that arise in Burroughs' description of the political parties of Interzone, as well as in his subtle description of an architecture that parallels (and becomes) the stretchiness (and vulnerability) of flesh, course through the echoing themes of *Naked Lunch*.

Cold War Rhetoric: Camouflage and X-Ray

Marita Sturken argues that constructions of "otherness" as an impending danger rely on the disavowal of contact between bodies, and that such constructions became particularly explicit during the Cold War era, though such constructions both preceded this time and have also continued in its wake. The construction of an endangered nation relies on the construction of a once pure, isolatable entity, free of contact between bodies – between selves and others. Thus, because this representation of America as once-coherent insists on a once exceptional and excepted nation, the depiction of "others" figures difference as a contaminant, as a dangerous force that will leave the nation incoherent and thus violated:

> Security as acquisition has also been closely allied with the image of the United States as virtuous and pristine in relation to other nations. [David] Campbell states, 'The ability to represent things as alien, subversive, dirty, or sick has been pivotal to the articulation of danger in the American experience.' Often this has

> been expressed as a form of paranoia: a powerful nation-state feeling continually under threat (disavowing its own power), seeing danger everywhere. This sense of danger was powerfully manifested during the cold war, when the Soviet Union was a compelling enemy against which fervent forms of patriotism were created. Yet the cold war was not exceptional; that guiding sense of danger, which preceded and has outlasted it, simply crystallized during that time. This defining sense of danger is inseparable in the United States from a culture of consumerism (39).

In Chapter 1, I argued that constructions of otherness became specifically articulated through discourses of visibility and legibility in the early decades of the twentieth century, in response to immigration and migration, and in answer to the shifts in both the national body and the "face of the nation" occurring at that time. The previous chapter also suggested that such fictions of otherness, in which the other threatens the bodily integrity or constitution of an imagined once-pure self, have continued to be articulated through the language of vision and the readable or legible. In turning to the narratives of security and infringement circulating in the context of the Cold War, then, I do so as a place of tracing the continued fears of illegibility that continued, and continue, to be articulated throughout the 20th and 21st century in American culture; and I turn here also because this time, as Sturken suggests, was an era during which proximate and dangerous "otherness" that threatened the nation-state (while eliding its own power) proliferated and "crystallized."

Naked Lunch, written amidst the post-WWII Cold War years in the United States, evidences a proliferation of eating and purchasing. Often the images of otherness that emerge in the novel are negotiated through consumption (eating, waste, and purchasing), in part because of

dominant discourses of otherness that proliferated in their articulation of an other that threatened to eat or usurp an imagined pure and integrated national body. It is no doubt that Burroughs' historical contexts inflected the material he addresses in his text. Jonathan Paul Eburne writes that *Naked Lunch* emerged in the context of pervasive narratives of security that pervaded the United States at this time:

> Under this consensus, a mass of 'anxieties' drawn from foreign and domestic policy alike – the fear of communism, the Bomb, homosexuality, sexual chaos and moral decrepitude, aliens (foreigners *and* extraterrestrials) – became condensed with a nightmarish lucidity upon a unifying rhetorical figure: a festering and highly contagious disease which threatened the national 'body' with pollution [. . .] indeed, what was most interesting in such manifestations of alien presence – was not its sameness but its seemingly ineluctable *difference*. As [Andrew] Ross suggests, behind the figuration of this difference was the danger of usurpation, the systematic transformation of 'us' into 'them' which would, in fact, result in a perverse sort of egalitarianism whereby American self-identity would dissolve. More specifically, it was the fear of infection, of the infiltration of a foreign pollutant into the American social body, which figured as this demonization's fundamental rhetorical anxiety. (60)

This danger of "usurpation" suggests that these anxieties pertain to fears of "submersion,"[24] and of being eaten or consumed by an outside other that threatens to take the place of the subject. Such anxieties presuppose a prior space of non-contact, in which the social body was isolated, intact, and orderly. The supposed threat – the dissolution of American self-identity – becomes a warrant for violence that proceeds under the rhetoric of protection (see Chapter 3), positing an

endangered national body whose constitution and coherence depends on the annihilation of those bodies which threaten to make the "national body" incoherent, unreadable. Again, these narratives rely on both an eclipse of power and on preserving ideologies of purity and readability, spaces of non-contact that once existed, but are in the process of being submerged. Sara Ahmed suggests that, "Such narratives work by generating a subject that is endangered by imagined others whose proximity threatens not only to take something away from the subject (jobs, security, wealth), but to take the place of the subject" (43). She states that narratives of violation operate by creating a subject that is threatened by imagined others; the threat these imagined others pose is not merely the threat of taking something away, but of taking the place of (usurping) the (imaginary) subject. At the time of Burroughs' writing, narratives of disease and pollutants worked alongside narratives of penetration and invasion. But it is the vital aspect of "usurpation" that, while encompassing these narratives of penetration and pollution, speaks not just to these terms (penetration, pollution, infection) but also to consumption – the fear not just of being penetrated or catching the disease, but also the fear of being swallowed, eaten up, digested, or becoming waste.

Eburne continues to describe this social and political climate as one in which discourses of health and national security converged in the national imaginary, threatened by infecting pollutants. The American "self," and the "integrity" of the body, he notes, was at stake in these narratives: "This 'self' was compound, a set of varying spatial boundaries and bulwarks, each protecting another's integrity. The versions of subjectivity at stake were liable to change and slide into multiple configurations; depending on the situation, depending on the concurring cultural and political contexts called upon for legitimacy, the 'self' at stake could be private, public, national, or all at once" (60-61). This is not exclusive to a Cold-War schematic of

personhood or nationhood; as Sturken notes, sentiments that produce narratives of "paranoia" – "a powerful nation-state feeling continually under threat (disavowing its own power), seeing danger everywhere" both preceded and outlasted the Cold War. But this is not merely a narrative in which the health or integrity of the nation is at stake, but one in which the imagined national body or bodily *surface* is in danger of being *taken over* and *becoming illegible*. The narrative of danger – that is, of the United States as endangered – is also one in which the health of the "self" is at stake not only because of the threat of infiltration, but the threat of visual incoherence that threatens to take over the imagined once-readable "self."

Such constructions also continued to be articulated through fears of illegibility and indistinguishability. In an interview taking place on August 11, 1950, J. Edgar Hoover stated that, "A Communist is not always easy to identify. He is trained in deceit and uses cleverly camouflaged movements to conceal his real purposes."[25] Hoover indicates that part of the "danger" lies in not being able to visually determine "who's who"[26] – the threat lies in not being able to visually distinguish "us" from "them." Communists are full of "deceit" and their movements are "camouflaged," and thus their difference cannot be measured or distinguished through the "taking in" – the consumption – of visible "information." But this fear of illegibility does not embrace the ultimate illegibility of "the Other"; rather, it suggests that despite such camouflage, a critical and aware vision can and should read him. His illegibility is to be opposed; he is to be shored up, and made legible in his otherness. *Naked Lunch* both reflects and negotiates such discourses of otherness that constructed the other as a danger to the constitution of selfhood. Hoover's statement bears striking resonance to the analysis of the phenotype discussed in the Introduction to this project. Like the phenotype, the visible paradoxically offers no truth in and of itself (as it can deceive), and simultaneously offers calculable realities, that can

be interpreted as truth upon investigation.

Rhetoric that proliferated during the Cold War evidenced fears of the internal/external threats such as communism and immigration, homosexuality and racial integration. Originally released in the similar historical context in which Burroughs wrote, the 1956 film *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* reflects (rather than negotiates, as Burroughs' work does) dominant fictions of "the Other" that suggest that such otherness threatens to corrupt a once-isolated national body, a national body once existing in an imagined space of non-contact; and, like such fictions, the film portrays a homogenous white body who is at risk (particularly the white male heterosexual body). In *Body Snatchers*, protagonist Miles is perpetually threatened by the giant sea-pods which have mysteriously brought the "body snatchers" to a small town, Santa Mira, in California. The "body snatchers" inexplicably take over the bodies of residents when they sleep, and these residents then wake up looking the same, even after having been overtaken by a pod/body snatcher. Not quite zombies, not quite monsters, when the body snatchers do their snatching, they leave people physically indistinguishable from the non-invaded (or snatched) body. Visibly, residents of Santa Mira are exactly the same. They have precisely the same features, and difference becomes illegible, surfaces of bodies unreadable. This illegibility, according to the narrative of *Body Snatchers*, is something to be feared; more importantly, this illegibility is something that both can and must be overcome, in order to preserve (intact) the white male heterosexual body.[27] Such once-intactness and essential states of legibility are presupposed in the context of such Cold War narratives, and it is this supposed integrity and coherency (readability) which are called upon to be defended in the face of difference.

Katrina Mann notes that the rhetoric and imagery employed in *Body Snatchers* may have been familiar to audience-goers as that which corresponded with discourses about racial

integration (into suburbs, in public schools) as well as immigration. She writes that, "Santa Mira's proximity to urban Californian centers besieged by the influx of myriad 'alien' others establishes xenophobic fears of neighborhood invasion as at least one familiar subtext for the film's horrific premise," and continues that,

> Whereas the residents' sense that the economic shift in Santa Mira was brought about by the influx of the alien invaders may not seem to present specific parallels with the arrival of migrant laborers, the film associates the aliens with popular discourses on these immigrants [. . .] Mexican immigrants [according to popular news articles of this time] were tricky performance artists who would stop at nothing to penetrate American borders. Similarly, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* abounds with tropes of deception, masquerade, and infiltration as the marauders sneak pods into intimate proximity of the remaining human residents. (55-56)

When one of the pods – in process of becoming person – is found by Miles and his compatriots, the face is still developing and the features are indistinct. The terror raised by such facelessness, coupled with the visual replication of bodily appearance maintained even with the invasion of the "alien," speaks to the terror centered in the fear of visual indistinguishability, and illegibility – the fear of not being able to read and process, digest the information supposedly held in facial and bodily surfaces. The fears of not being able to tell "one" from "the other," and a face that is not readable, coalesce with fears of being submerged by alien/outside "others." Again, illegibility is to be feared – it is, in fact, the overarching fear of the entire story relayed in *Body Snatchers*. Like Hoover's assertion that the Communist works through camouflaging or disguising himself, *Body Snatchers* reflects the continuing discourses of otherness emphasized during the Cold War that suggested the dire threat of unreadable surfaces. The trope of

masquerade suggests that one appears in deceit, in camouflage; while he presents himself in disguise, his disguise can and should be removed, seen through. Otherness is ultimately detectable, and should be detected, made properly legible.

These multiple internal/external "others" that endangered the face and body of the U.S. nation continued to be articulated through registers of visibility or visuality. Fiona Paton suggests that, in the 1950 hearings on homosexuality in the government,[28] homosexuality was constructed as both a disease and as monstrous. But the rhetoric of the hearing emphasized not only the fears of an invading disease or a vampiric force, but also the fears of undetectable otherness, indistinguishable surfaces. Paton states that, "In his summary of one government hearing into homosexuality, David Johnson notes that a senator asked, " 'There is no quick test like an X-ray that discloses these things?'" (qtd. in Paton 58). The question echoes proliferating discourses that evidence a dominating fear of illegibility. Can we not, the senator asks, find a way to *see* "the Other," a mechanism of *reading* him, of shoring him up, of knowing exactly who and what he is.

The desire for an X-Ray that "discloses these things" resonates with "The Examination" in *Naked Lunch*, and also echoes earlier, turn of the century discourses about the truth that could be revealed through the use of X-Ray (see Introduction and Chapter 1). In this section of the novel, Carl Peterson is summoned to the office of Dr. Benway, who half-apologetically informs Carl that he is under suspicion of having homosexual tendencies. Benway tells Carl that homosexuality is a sickness, as tuberculosis is a sickness, and as such, warrants containment or quarantine. The descriptions of Benway's eyes on Carl's face suggest that the doctor is attempting to evaluate him through mechanisms of visual cues, as "the doctor's eyes flickered across Carl's face" a first time, and they are "eyes without a trace of warmth or hate or any

emotion that Carl had ever experienced" (158). The doctor's eyes are specifically attempting to read Carl's face, and yet a second time this occurs as, "once again Carl felt the impact of that cold interest on his face" (158). Burroughs describes the gaze of the doctor as cold and as scientific, paralleling the desire for an X-ray to evaluate his potential for "sexual deviation." Benway tells Carl that he is present for a "psychic fluoroscope" (159), again reiterating that the medical examination intends to "scientifically" *read* him. The implementation of a fluoroscope, which utilizes a screen and X-ray machine to make visible the body that stands between that screen and the source of rays, suggests that the medical device might be used to identify deviation or difference through the use of highly advanced visual technologies. The fact that the fluoroscope is "psychic" suggests that difference that might not be readable on the surface, or even in the surface of internal physicalities (that can be exposed through visual technologies to the external), can too be shored up with the implementation of the most systematic screenings; camouflage can be overcome. Burroughs' psychic fluoroscope thus parodies dominant and official discourses that longed for, and believed in, the possibility of shoring up, reading, and identifying difference (making "the Other" legible).

After Carl undergoes questioning, he is forced to produce a semen sample for the purposes of what Benway refers to as the "Blomberg-Stanislouski semen flocculation test . . . a diagnostic tool" (160). While Benway implies that it is the content of the semen itself that will be used for diagnosis, Carl's experience suggests that it is not the semen itself, but the act of masturbation and ejaculation, that will serve as a tool. As much is assumed in the aftermath of the test, during which time Benway refers to the test as a "Robinson-Kleiberg flocculation test" (162), a different name than that which he had previously referenced (the Blomberg-Stanislouski test), and Carl questions this suspect contradiction. The doctor laughs in response to Carl's

apparent confusion, but readers are left suspecting that the examination has been a sham, and such suspicions are built before Benway even makes this error, in the context of the exam itself. As Carl is ejaculating, he feels eyes upon him, watching his every move: "the shifting of his testes, the contractions of his rectum" (160). Though readers are not sure whether this is a hallucination of the examinee, the eyes of the doctor, the injunctions of a panoptic society, or another unnamed and unreferenced person (or people), it is clear that the ejaculation process itself is undergoing examination.

Perhaps in a state of hallucination, and perhaps not, when Carl finishes, he sees someone sitting in the room, watching him; while Carl "could not see his face," it is a face yet described as "swollen, skull-less, eyes like burning pus" (160). The disciplining and colonizing gaze that accompanies Carl merges legibility with medicine, reiterating the desire to locate a "scientific" measure of detecting otherness, to see through his camouflage, which likewise comes together in the desire for X-raying one's body in order to visually identify him as heterosexual or homosexual. The reader presumes that the supposed use of semen as a method of diagnosing Carl's homosexual tendencies works as a façade for a diagnosis proceeding from the intense gaze upon the body, an intense and investigatory surveillance of the movements of his testes and his rectum, as if their being visually screened might elicit his readable potential for "sexual deviation." Yet in its indeterminacy, be it the semen or the act of producing it, the scene elicits an overlap of medical and visual registers and rhetoric by which power wishes to make the body readable, and that it is through conflating such discourses that legibility of body and identity continue to be articulated as both possible and desirable.

Manipulating Metaphors

Burroughs manipulates the metaphor of the disease that Eburne suggests proliferated in the national imaginary, as viruses, parasites, hosts, and cancers appear throughout the text of *Naked Lunch*. While dominant narratives of otherness identified Communists, homosexuals, and foreigners with the image of the disease, Burroughs' novel suggests that such articulations of otherness are always tenuous, and premised on a false sense of stability. Burroughs' work contests narratives that insist on prior spaces of non-contact, isolatability, and legibility of surfaces because, throughout *Naked Lunch*, bodies are always in contact with other bodies, the spaces "between" are always already full of materiality, and the flesh of the body is always already in contact with the flesh that is the world. These ongoing negotiations of contact make the body impressionable, vulnerable, exploitable, and interdependent. Burroughs implements these metaphors of disease not to reiterate their hold over American discourse, but rather to juxtapose the ways in which such metaphors function.

The Interzone that Burroughs constructs is not an ideal space of harmonious connection between bodies, as "The City is visited by epidemics of violence, and the untended dead are eaten by vultures in the streets" (90). The city also does not exist outside of dominant systems, and *Naked Lunch* still has its own moments of othering. As Fiona Paton suggests, Burroughs' text also reproduces dominant discourses of psychiatry and disease, even as it works to undermine and rescript such national rhetoric.[29] While we should be careful not to idealize the Interzone and *Naked Lunch*, there remain multiple elements of the Interzone and of the text itself that offer, I argue, moments that counteract typical conceptions of visuality, space, time, and contact between bodies, and that these moments can offer a space for reconceiving of embodiment, in which "the Other" cannot be shored up, and in which contact between bodies – and the proliferation of materiality – quite literally fill the space of both the Interzone and the

text. I argue that, despite its moments of reproducing and reiterating Cold War discourses of otherness, it also offers us metaphors by which to reconceive of the flesh, and how, in our flesh, we approach "the Other."

If dominant discourses of otherness tend to efface contact in order to disavow power or violence, Burroughs' work sought to undermine this through reconstructing metaphors of disease: "The end result of complete cellular representation is cancer. Democracy is cancerous, and bureaus are its cancer. A bureau takes root anywhere in the state, turns malignant like the Narcotic Bureau, and grows and grows, always reproducing more of its own kind, until it chokes the host if not controlled or excised. Bureaus cannot live without a host, being true parasitic organisms" (112). Burroughs counteracts what dominant narratives suggest is represented with the metaphor of the disease, proposing that the State acts as the virus – and the disease itself becomes the repetition of the same, homogenization rather than difference. Frederick Whiting notes that, in contesting dominant psychiatric/psychopathologizing discourses of deviation, "Burroughs removes the monstrous from an organic or developmental disruption of nature at the personal level and makes it a pervasive structural feature of the social system" (166). In essence, Burroughs reconstructed norms and normativity as monstrous, and refigured the "abnormal" of psychiatry and pathology as the invaded. In addition to an analysis of homogenization and difference in the dominant national imaginary, Burroughs suggested that addiction itself was a product of the monopolizing forces of capital and power, social forces that triumphed with the subjection of human life to its commercial reduction of the flesh to a commodity. Burroughs continues that, "Bureaucracy is wrong as a cancer, a turning away from the human evolutionary direction of infinite potentials and differentiation and independent spontaneous action to the complete parasitism of a virus" (112). *Naked Lunch* implies that it is not difference that

threatens to overtake the body, but rather the State itself, and its teleological aims at homogenization and classification, the monopolization of the body itself through regimes of legibility. Steven Shaviro discusses the presence of viral imagery in *Naked Lunch*, discussing the nature of viruses:

> We are all tainted with viral origins, because life itself is commanded and impelled by something alien to life. The life possessed by a cell, and all the more so by a multicellular organism, is finally only its ability to carry out the orders transmitted to it by DNA and RNA. It scarcely matters whether these orders originate from a virus, or from what we conceive as the cell's own nucleus. For this distinction is only a matter of practical convenience. It is impossible actually to isolate the organism in a state before it has been infiltrated by viruses, or altered by mutation; we cannot separate out the different segments of DNA, and determine which are intrinsic to the organism and which are foreign. (41)

Like Shaviro's description of the impossible dividing lines between intrinsic and foreign, alien or natural, the organism that is not only the human body, but the national body, bears the same impossibly pure moments of isolation from "infiltration" and "mutation." Despite the common implementation of the virus as a rhetorical device for constructing the otherness of that which, or who, threatened to usurp, submerge, or overtake the surface of the national body (or face), leaving an incoherent and dissipated entity in its wake, Burroughs' text contends that bodies are always already usurped, overtaken, and that once pure and isolatable bodies are merely imagined projections that are a result of dominant mythologies.

Intelligibility and the Abject

While the national imaginary in the 1950s (and into the present) figure the United States

as an entity which once existed in a prior idealized space of non-contact with others, Burroughs insists that the body of the self and the nation are always already in contact; thus, bodies in Burroughs' text are never stable, always subject to self-alterity. Burroughs' text is incessantly aware of material contact with the world, and he reflects on this contact not only through rearranging metaphors of disease, but also through interrogations of consumption and contact. In one of the most infamous passages from this work, the agent (also the doctor) Benway describes a man he once knew who taught his ass to talk: "This man worked for a carnival you dig, and to start with it was like a novelty ventriloquist act. Really funny, too, at first [. . .] After a while the ass started talking on its own" (111). While the carnival man initially demonstrates his control over his ass, the dimensions of the man's body begin to alter, as the ass "developed sort of teeth-like little raspy incurving hooks and started eating. He thought this was cute at first and built an act around it, but the asshole would eat its way through his pants and start talking on the street, shouting out it wanted equal rights" (111). Eventually the ass begins to eat, get drunk, and declare its intention to consume the man who trained it to speak: " 'It's you who will shut up in the end. Not me. Because we don't need you around here any more. I can talk and eat and shit" (111). After this the man begins to be overtaken by a jelly substance called "Undifferentiated Tissue, which can grow into any kind of flesh on the human body" (111). The man is overtaken by himself; he is eaten and subjected by his own body. The self-othering straight-John turning crab reoccurs in this narrative, transmutating.

Kristeva identifies abject material as that which recalls the opening and vulnerability of the body. Among the material she identifies as abject are food and excrement, since these are objects that remind us of the tenuous borders of the flesh. When the asshole begins speaking, eating, and shitting on its own, which is followed by the asshole's consumption of the man who

has taught it to speak, it is precisely through this contact and opening that the dimensions of the body alter. Eating and shitting are reminders that the body is incessantly in contact with the world "outside." Food – in terms of eating, waste (as in garbage) and waste (as in shit) – is part of identity; food comes from the outside in, and it also moves in the direction from the inside to the outside. The boundaries between the in and out are constantly fluctuating and unstable, and the various forms of contact that are present in food are also a source of its abjection. Chad Lavin argues that political action has become mediated through, and has in some sense become a matter mostly of, consumerism. He states that

> Attention to food reveals our bodies as complex assemblages inexorably implicated in other assemblages – not only the molecular assemblages that organize nutrition and ecology, but industrial assemblages of production and distribution, economic assemblages of labor and exchange, and cultural assemblages of cuisine and class. As the artifact that most visibly demonstrates the unavoidability of these assemblages, food often contains our most distilled and intensified political commitments. (n. pag.)

Food, according to Lavin, often embodies the most poignant of politics for individuals because intertwined in the webbings of food are (even when "invisible") inequities of production, distribution, labor, class, race, sex, gender. Lavin takes this further, to suggest that food bears the "most visible" signifier of such inequities, as well as (implicitly) the "most visible" signifier of *contact between bodies*.[30] Thus, both food and assholes in *Naked Lunch* represent openings and spillings, in and out of the body, and also suggest the contact that occurs by way of food, consumption (as both eating and purchasing of commodities), and waste.

Additionally, the asshole's contact with the world through language effects the shape

taken by the body, the contours and dimensions that reconfigure it. It is because of this contact that the man is vulnerable to his asshole. In discussing Burroughs' work, Shaviro suggests the significance of waste in Burroughs' negotiations of selfhood and otherness: "My shit is my inner essence; yet I cannot assimilate it to myself, but find myself always compelled to give it away" (40). Selfhood and bodies, in Burroughs, both are and are not our own. Shit and assholes[31] in *Naked Lunch* are reminders of the incessant contact between interiority and exteriority, and recalls the flimsy and vulnerable barrier that supposedly stands between them, creating pure and isolated flesh. Contact with the world continuously changes our dimensions, and this is evidenced through the many orifices that appear in Burroughs' work. No prior-space of non-contact in which identity can be asserted for and of itself, outside of its "outside" connectivities, exists. Thus when dominant narratives suggest that "the Other" threatens to overtake what is understood to be the body of the self, be it individual or national, it is only through the denial of the contact always already ongoing between that self and its "others." And bodies are vulnerable and exploitable because of this contact – because of the out going in, and in out, of the body. Burroughs utilized this as a framework for challenging the typical articulations of an isolated zone, and also opposed such narratives of possible isolation through the space of the Interzone in *Naked Lunch*.

The eating, shitting, and talking of the carnival man's asshole in *Naked Lunch* is hardly the limitation of the constant appearance of body parts and bodily functions that permeate Burroughs' extremely grotesque text. This emphatic emergence of abject and grotesque bodily fluids, parts, and processes continually asserts the materiality of the body, and its contact with the fleshliness of the world and other bodies. The bringing to trial of *Naked Lunch* on obscenity charges[32] attests further to the danger of the interstitiality of the Interzone, full of the abject –

proliferating with assholes, piss, cum, sex, and raucous, obstreperous narrative form – and to the desire to remove such scenes of turbulence from a public, national "body" (though never being able to do so). This pertains to Kristeva's abject, in which the subject attempts to rid itself, repress, or hide, the abject, which can never actually be eliminated from the constitution of the subject or body. To preserve the tenuous "borders" that kept out the infecting, infiltrating, consuming "others" there were (and are) "internal" bodies (both human bodies and bodies of writing) that prompted – and prompt – the desire for repression, invisibility, expulsion, or censorship. The (literal) shit on Burroughs' page was called to be disacknowledged, as it "shits" all over the homogenized appearance that linguistic and visual discourses of power sought (and seek) to maintain for and of themselves. Directly following the account of the talking asshole, Burroughs writes,

> That's the sex that passes the censor, squeezes through between bureaus, because there's always a space *between*, in popular songs and Grade B movies, giving away the basic American rottenness, spurting out like breaking boils, throwing out globs of that un-D.T. to fall anywhere and grow into some degenerate cancerous life-form, reproducing a hideous random image. Some would be entirely made of penis-like erectile tissue, others viscera barely covered over with skin, clusters of three and four eyes together, crisscross of mouth and assholes, human parts shaken around and poured out any way they fell. (112)

The conglomeration of human parts, wastes, and fluids that "crisscross" are at a space of in-betweenness, both in and out (much like the Interzone itself). Burroughs recites abject materials relentlessly, and even in the effort to expel the abject, its presence not only lingers, but "spurts" through the clean narratives of body, both individual and national. Though regimes of power

(the bureaus) might wish to expel, or expunge, the abject, in order to construct borders which preserve it, imaginarily, as whole (and innocent/pure/isolated), the abject is still "throwing globs" in spaces of in-betweenness, neither wholly in nor out. As Deborah Covino notes, "the abject is always being articulated (though negatively) by and within the systems that seek to dispel it. The fetishizing of wholeness and integration, then, is part of an imaginary that the body just does not abide or respect; the clean and proper body valorized by the social symbolic is a fantasy" (71). Thus the Interzone is a space in which things squeeze by, burst out, and destroy the fetisthized notion of wholeness, purity, and integration that enables discourses of power to continually create an imaginary whole self, threatened by the submergence provoked in the presence of difference (an abjection that is always already enmeshed in that "self"). The Interzone is a space in which materiality busts and bursts in the spaces between those bodies, and objects, other bodies, and the world.

Interzonality, Illegibility, Invisibility

Throughout *Naked Lunch*, we are not given a reliable and consistent narrator. We often are pressed and pulled between voices, narrators, and characters without being able to fully trust what is happening or who is speaking. This uncertainty is also conveyed between characters themselves. The narrator states that, "A.J. is an agent like me, but for whom or what no one has ever been able to discover. It is rumored that he represents a trust of giant insects from another galaxy . . . I believe he is on the Factualist side (which I also represent); of course he could be a Liquefaction Agent [. . .] You can never be sure of anyone in the industry" (123). No one has ever been able to uncover A.J.'s political affiliation within the Zone, and his situation is certainly not unique. Not only is A.J. unreadable to anyone in the Interzone, but anyone involved in the industry is ambiguous. The narrator also tells readers that, "Since there is no way to detect a

disguised replica (though every Divisionist has some method he considers infallible) Divisionists are hysterically paranoid" (139). Likewise, Burroughs suggests that Divisionists are paranoid, attempting always to make legible divisions between "one" and "the other," trying to delineate replicas from their "originals," and yet, that dectection of disguise – that reading of "the Other" and shoring him up – is not possible in the Zone. In discussing liquefaction, we are told that, "except for one man, entirely composed of dupes, it not being clear until the final absorption who is whose dupe" (136). This observation parallels the self-mutating figures that continue to arise throughout the course of the text. In all the above segments, Burroughs' characters demonstrate that the visible doesn't grant knowledge of identity. Liminality emerges in the straight John becoming crab, the Sender turning giant centipede, the talking asshole, and the ambiguity of who is who's dupe. The desire for detection of disguises, and the incapacity to see through the "camouflage" of the visible world, represents a fear of undetectable otherness – which we can see in the figure of the Communist, via Hoover's statement, and in the desire for an X-ray that reads potential deviation. The ambiguity and illegibility of visual cues or bodies is evident in the Interzone. The society of the Zone does not ever allow for this truth to be revealed, never suggests that legibility is a real possibility. Every Divisionist may have a method he considers infallible, but Burroughs confirms for readers that there is, in fact, no true mechanism of reading and charting "the Other."

The Interzone also represents a space of ambiguity and illegibility in its in-betweenness. And it is this in-betweenness that leads to its apparent invisibility. Burroughs depicts the Interzone as a place existing both separate from, and within, dominant culture. Loewinsohn notes that, in addition to the multiple symbolic meanings carried by the space of the Interzone, it is additionally "where the underworld of crime and drugs interfaces with the mainstream world,

the place where middle-class citizens come to satisfy those hungers (for dope or sex) that the straight world doesn't even want to acknowledge as existing" (569). Thus, this space is one of constant in-betweenness of control (who is or is not self-determining), of visual confusion (incapacity to determine who's who), of identity (again, who's who), of sexuality (no one in *Naked Lunch* seems to be "straight" by any understanding of the word – sexual orientation or otherwise), and also of geography and culture. The mapping of the Interzone itself lies simultaneously at, beyond, and between borders of literal locations as well as cultures. And the ambiguity and illegibility of such a space are precisely what leads to its "invisibility," inasmuch as the "straight world" does not want to acknowledge the existence of the Interzone. And in this sense, the desire for the Interzone to disappear, so to speak, makes "interzones" a space in which to reconceive of embodiment, in its proposal that contact takes place, even when not visible, and even when denied in the dominant sphere. The metaphor of the Interzone offers us a space in which bodies are illegible, and so offers a vision of the betweenness and illegibility of all bodies.

In the previous chapter, the connection between cartography and legibility emerged in the discussion of Ellison's *Invisible Man*. The question of cartography also arises in conjunction with Burroughs' Interzone, a place that is geographically and dynamically complicated. Its dimensions as a *place* are at once literal and metaphoric, at once a palimpsest of Tangiers and other locales in which Burroughs had lived, and a representational space of inside-outness of power, subjugation, selfhood, and alterity. In both its literality and metaphoricity, the Interzone resists the mapping powers that wish to create bounded cartographical form of its illegibilities. Such spaces, which reveal the tentative and ongoingly formative nature of all bodies, threatens the dictates of conventional narratives of both otherness and vision, and thus these dominant narratives elide the presence of such spaces or bodies – to make invisible or, appropriately, to

censor – those bodies that endanger regimes of classificatory legibility. Trinh-T Minh-Ha cites a passage from Maurice Blanchot's *Thomas the Obscure*, and follows this recitation with an analysis of what the "space," connoted in Blanchot's passage, reveals:

> *She had not drawn something out of nothing (a meaningless act), but given to nothing, in its form of nothing, the form of something. The act of not seeing had now its integral eye. The silence, the real silence, the one which is composed of silenced words, of possible thoughts, had a voice* (Maurice Blanchot). The space offered is not that of an object brought to visibility, but that of the very invisibility of the invisible within the visible. It is thus the space of an activity in which everything takes on a collective value in spite of skepticism. (187-188)

Echoing Irigaray's assertion that the philosopher forgets air[33] – the matter and material of air and, as Kelly Oliver notes, the contact present therein – Trinh proposes an acknowledgement of this forgetting of the material. This is also, as I have argued, where a "queer look" might emerge, in a refusal to see "straight," in recognizing the materiality of the invisible. Trinh calls forth the spatiality of a queer look, as well as the space of Interzones and Interzonal bodies. Queer vision, or a queer look, does not seek to call forth the invisible to the land of the visible, but rather it aims to bring to visibility "the very invisibility of the invisible within the visible." Burroughs' text suggests that the Interzone also functions as a threshold, and because of its liminality, is erased from dominant imaginaries. Narratives of isolation persist in the imaginary of the pure and extricatable body, and thrive through their insistence on narratives of vision which seek to establish the visible as penultimate source of truth or knowledge. If the visible, then, no longer bears this promise to be a readable surface – in that, within the visible, the invisible is an active (and therefore a consequential, meaningful) space that remains invisible –

then the visible as distinguishing marker/border cannot retain its hold over the imaginary. If histories and bodies are no longer "readable" surfaces, then the geographical and morphological maps that organize national and bodily borders lose the cleanliness of those borders, and thus forego the possibility of being dissolved by the infringement of outside "others," as the inside and out become ambiguous, not wholly distinguishable or readable demarcations.

Merleau-Ponty writes that, "What we call the visible is [. . .] a quality pregnant with texture, the surface of a depth, a cross section upon a massive being, a grain or corpuscle borne by a wave of Being" (136). The visible is pregnant with texture; the surface contains its own invisible depths. And what is legible to the eye is merely a cross section of a massive being of visibility, which incorporates the invisible into its composition as a visible entity. This invisibility remains an active space in which processes of self-difference (or othering-of-self), of constant transformation and mutation (a space in which instability always already resides and reigns) incessantly inform the contours of the visible. The insistence on the possibility of totally coherent and legible bodies relies on the visible as truth-teller, because it allows one to distinguish "one" from "the other," a philosophy on which narratives of isolation gain and sustain ground – as they entail pure, separable entities, with unambiguous borders and solid identities. Invisible interzones, or the interzones of the invisible (and the interzones of the visible itself) challenge dominant narratives of otherness that insist on delineable spaces, bodies, borders – chartable races, sexualities, genders ("maps of legibility"[34]). Contact between zones continues to occur in Burroughs' text, even when that contact remains invisible; but it is also undeniable, in *Naked Lunch* – as is particularly clear in the instances of the carnival man, the Sender, and the "straight John" – that such contact (even when invisible) incessantly, ongoingly, informs the contours that material bodies take. And materiality, even when it does not surface,

exists in spaces "in between." While this project does not mean to suggest that we can bring the contact and materiality of betweenness into the visible world, it proposes that we must acknowledge this space of betweenness as both material and meaningful.

The Flesh of Commerce

Marita Sturken suggests that narratives of otherness, premised on the construction of an impending danger, took a particularly explicit form during the Cold War, but that this sense of danger both preceded and outlasted that time period. What I would like to emphasize, however, is Sturken's claim that, "This defining sense of danger is inseparable in the United States from a culture of consumerism." In Sturken's formulation, purchasing commodities functions as a solution to fears of endangerment and disempowerment, and that historical events[35] (within the context of a society of consumers) that jeopardize a supposed isolated conception of the U.S. have consistently elicited citizen response that conflates the purchase of goods with a restored sense of security (and isolation). In a society of consumers, as Sturken and others[36] have noted, the citizen is often hailed in terms of the consumer – is often called to in order to fill patriotic duties through acts of consumption. In the midst of this disempowerment, one is called on to consume precisely to take on an active, dominant role; to be *the one who consumes*. In moments of disempowerment, the U.S. citizen is called on to consume precisely to invert the position of feeling oneself being the "consumed," a position in which one feels a threat to the security or stability of a presumedly whole and pure entity. One is urged, in a state of disempowerment, precisely and quite literally, to take the place of consumer (meanwhile continually dispersing the narrative that one must consume precisely because of the threat of consumption by "the other"). One is urged to become a consumer, meanwhile being urged to *selectively discard the title of consumer for that of consumed, so that one may "innocently" continue to consume*.

Acts of consumerism in the United States, as Sturken argues, often function as an elision or an erasure of the global politics that are at the nexus of the production and consumption of products, and that the labor, violence, and inequities at the convergence of the object are effaced as consumption of a product becomes an isolated choice. Throughout *Naked Lunch*, bodies – and bodily material – never disappear. And consumerism involves – even, arguably, *is* – flesh. Contrary to narratives of isolation (that to purchase does not involve contact between various bodies), Burroughs' text suggests that flesh is inextricably tied to acts of consumption. Burroughs describes the Interzone: "Panorama of the City of Interzone. Opening bars of 'East St. Louis Toodle-oo' . . . at times loud and clear then faint and intermittent like music down a windy street . . . The Composite City where all human potentials are spread out in a vast silent market." (89) The vast, silent market is fundamentally connected to human bodies, human potential, and the selling of products is also the selling of bodies. Burroughs insists that, "The junk merchant does not sell his product to the consumer, he sells to the consumer to his product. He does not improve and simplify his merchandise. He degrades and simplifies the client" (201). For Burroughs, consumption is a matter of *selling bodies*. Zygmunt Bauman states that the commodities people "are prompted to put on the market, promote and sell are *themselves*" (6). He continues, stating that bodies are, in a society of consumers, "simultaneously, *promoters of commodities and the commodities they promote.* They are, at the same time, the merchandise and their marketing agents [. . .] The test they need to pass in order to be admitted to the social prizes they covet demands them *to recast themselves as commodities:* that is, as products capable of catching the attention and attracting *demand* and *customers*" (6). Bauman's suggestion that in a society of consumers, people themselves have become commodities, might be considered alongside Burroughs' depiction of a marketplace of human potential, and a consumer who is

himself being sold to the product. Thus, in *Naked Lunch* any act of consumption is never a solitary act, but involves ongoing contact. Consumption always already implicates flesh and contact.

Robert, owner of *Chez Robert* in *Naked Lunch*, operates a restaurant serving some of the world's premiere cuisine. When A.J., an agent in the Interzone, instigates a fight between himself and Robert, A.J. emerges victorious when he emits a hog call, and hogs rush into the restaurant, eating Robert. After Robert's being consumed by the hog, the restaurant is taken over by Robert's brother Paul, and the restaurant is re-named "Transcendental Cuisine." Contrary to its name, the quality of food served in Paul's restaurant continues to deteriorate, until the restaurant is eventually serving "literal garbage," and frequenters fail to issue complaint due its outstanding reputation. Among the sample items enumerated are, "The Clear Camel Piss Soup with boiled Earth Worms" and "The Limburger Cheese sugar cured in diabetic urine, doused in Canned Heat Flamboyant" (125). Meanwhile, consumers who eat at the restaurant are "quietly dying of botulism" (126). This passage reveals Burroughs' philosophy about merchandise and consumers, as the product itself is not improved to fit the needs of the consumer, but the consumer is rather degraded and is himself sold to the product.

The flesh of consumers quite literally become the product being consumed, as the entrees being served cause eaters to die of botulism. The product (food, which is also waste), which is being consumed by the clientele of "Transcendental Cuisine" actually eats away at (consumes) the client, who in turn becomes the product (human flesh) being consumed by the product (food, which is again, also waste). Thus, human flesh is configured as the commodity, being marketed and sold. The threshold of food and waste is tenuous, and food and waste proliferate here precisely to serve as recollections of the liminality of the flesh, and disrupt dominant conceptions

of both isolation and lines of legibility. If traditional narratives of isolation circulating within a society of consumers in the U.S. erase the flesh from the equations of purchasing and eating choices, *Naked Lunch* rehearses the implication of the flesh, and suggests that the "transcendence" of consumerism and consumerist choices, can all but be above, or beyond, the contact between – and commodification of – bodies. In Burroughs' text, eating is inextricably tied to garbage and waste, and bodies are necessarily exchanged, commodified, and in contact.

Reading Illegible

Naked Lunch responds to, dialogues with, and works to oppose the narratives of otherness that permeated Burroughs' Cold War context. Contrary to typical conceptions of "the Other" which flourished in his time, Burroughs' text juxtaposes commonly disseminated metaphors of viruses, destabilizes notions of eating and being eaten (which encompass a subject wholly isolatable from "outside" material – that permeate popular rhetoric; rather, the novel exposes bodies, with their abject fluids and parts, as the fleshliness elided in the national imaginary. The space "between" in *Naked Lunch* is always already full, bursting with materiality. All "betweens" in *Naked Lunch* spill out all over the page, and the density of this between-ness offers us an image of contact that challenges typical conceptions of vision – in that the "between" is typically seen as an empty gulf of space, simply because it is not visible – and fictions of isolation – which rely on an erasure of the flesh of consumerism and commerce, and depict an extricatable self. In part, such fictions are challenged through the incessant emergence and appearance of abject material. Contrary to the narratives of the nation, which construct an imaginary pure and whole body, the abject exposes the presupposed lines drawn between what is considered the inside and outside of a given body. But Burroughs' text does more than merely spill abject materials all over its pages; through that very spilling, the text itself becomes abject.

The novel both spills over with, and is itself, abject material. The materials that threaten the borders between the body and the world, between inside and outside, are everywhere present in the text, as are the orifices that indicate and necessitate that connection. Assholes have mouths, and mouths are assholes, and the orifices that signify and permit the entering and exiting of outside materials subject the characters in *Naked Lunch* to mutation and transformation, and spaces of non-contact do not exist. The text itself performs, and imposes, a similar abjection. In the novel's chaotic form, readers are thrown about into a hurricane of voices, faces, body parts, sexual acts, bodily functions, and genres of writing. Attempts at constructing an integrated body of writing are continually denied to the reader, resisted by the disorderly content and form of the text. Just when a passage, or even a sentence, within Burroughs' text, seems to be "a straight John at last," the novel itself turns into a crab, becomes something other than itself, transforming into other bodies, species, voices, and forms. There is no "straight John at last," in either the characters or the bodies we encounter in the book, or in the form that the book itself takes. We are never given whole legibility, or a properly and cleanly bordered entity which can be made wholly readable to us. The leakage of wastes and fluids that permeates the content of the novel also permeates the form, which resists the obedience of borders and ordering, classification and legibility.

Fiona Paton suggests that, along with the abjection that pervades the Interzone and the pages of *Naked Lunch*, the text itself also forces the reader himself to experience such abjection, in that *Naked Lunch*, which is notoriously "unreadable" indeed, "abjectifies the reader, through a narrative voice that is both monologically controlling [. . .] and indeterminately open" (62). Nothing about Burrough's text, as a text, respects rules or borders, and its repulsiveness persists not only in content, but in form. The incapacity in *Naked Lunch* to shore up, to expel material in

order to create an orderly narrative, produces a narrative that is itself illegible. Thus, I argue that Burroughs' text itself is a space for renegotiating embodiment. It refuses to make itself readable to us, and in that illegibility, that abjection, and that profuse materiality of the text, we might reconsider what it means to be a subject or what it means to be in a body. *Naked Lunch* refuses us the desire to expel, to make an orderly and properly-bordered body of the text. If *Naked Lunch* were the text referenced when one says, "I can read you like a book," we would always already acknowledge that this "you" is illegible before us,[37] and rather than refusing to acknowledge the materiality of the space between us, we would know that the space between is proliferating with matter and material that do *matter*.

In Chapter 1, I argued that discourses of legibility came to fruition in response to the movements and migrations of bodies that placed the "face of the nation" and the national "body" in supposed jeopardy, and these narratives relied on the articulation of a national self that was once pure, whole and readable. Such fictions rely on the eclipse of bodily contact that is always already ongoing. In this chapter, I have suggested that Cold War rhetorical constructions of otherness evidences only one of the many times in which such narratives have continued to permeate how we understand our seeing of, and the legibility of, "the Other." Like Schuyler's *Black No More* and Ellison's *Invisible Man*, William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* negotiates these dominant discourses, and aims to intervene in how bodies are commonly understood as wholly separable entities. In the incessant projecting of abject materials, in the contact existing in the spaces "between," and in the fleshly contact always already involved in commercial products and consumer choices, the text offers us a narrative that resists dominant conceptions of what or how we can see or read. The narrative we are offered is that of a space of betweenness that is spilling over with hands and legs, mouths and rectums, genitals and emissions, fluids and

waste, food and death. It is a building whose walls bulge with and like bodies, whose structures are never static. This image resists notions of bodily purity and refuses ideologies of vision and contact that deny the body's presence in the exchange of commodities, and the material presence in the "spaces between."

The implemention of Merleau-Ponty's notion of "chiasmic intertwining" introduced earlier in this chapter is not without problems. The idea that humans, or nations, may "chiasmicallly intertwine" is a notion of fantasy; not in the sense of whimsicality, but in the same sense in which Butler argues that re-working new sets of norms through the work of fantasy is "as crucial as bread."[38] At present, at least, it is not possible for the relations between humans (or at least, for the most part) to "chiasmically intertwine," as this problematically connotes an equality between distributions of wealth, resources, and protection by the State. When some bodies are more valuable or "grievable,"[39] and others are more vulnerable or consumable, interactions between bodies cannot exist without the violent annihilation of an Other. While contact between bodies is, I argue, always already inevitable, "intertwining" connotes a non-violent contact between bodies, which most certainly does not persist in reality. But underlying this violent interaction of exploitation is in part a result of the failure to – and a desire not to – read bodies *as* chiasmically intertwining, as *in contact*. Such violence persists under the trajectory of dominant fictions that work to deny, erase, or reduce the visibility, of this contact. In order to change this fundamentally negative and annihilative relationship between self/other, one would first have to *imagine* different kinds of relations; that is to say, *imagining relations as chiasmic intertwinings*, by exposing those histories of contact which have been effaced in fictions that work to legitimate violence, and proposing new ways of seeing and acting more justly through a more critical analysis of vision, touch, and contact (and through a more critical

seeing itself).

To understand "betweenness" as a space that connects us to others, rather than that which alienates us from others, Kelly Oliver insists, can lead to "opening a space beyond domination," and "towards an acknowledgement of otherness" (75). Burroughs' text presents a space in which the between teems with activity. As such, we are called to acknowledge the contact that bodies and flesh are always already making. Legibility in *Naked Lunch* is a ruse of power, and Burroughs works to parody the systematic desire for making one's body legible before the State, subjecting "the Other" to the rigorous apparati of visual identification in order to make him readable. Rendering his own text "notoriously unreadable," Burroughs issues a political critique of the systems of classification which seek to make bodies ultimately comprehensible and visibly delineable through the "psychic fluoroscopes" that elucidate the imagined truth of the body and the self. Finally, no surfaces are entirely legible in Burroughs, and no bodies are wholly coherent.

Queer/Spilling Bodies and Texts

In the introductory chapter of this project, I argued that a queer reading practice abides in an acknowledgement the *both* the invisible and visible cannot afford us totality of knowledge, whole coherency, final legibility. Though Burroughs' characters rarely, if ever, implement such a reading practice, Burroughs himself employs these queer strategies, as he (author) refuses to make characters entirely legible to either himself or to his readers; he refuses the reader the ultimately legibility desired by many of the power-mongering creatures that populate the Interzone and the pages of *Naked Lunch*. And in asserting that "this book spill off the page in all directions," he presents a very queer spatiality of literature. The Introduction to this project described queer reading practices as those practices that negotiate approaches to text themselves,

in proposing that a book is not confined to its pages – that all cannot be made legible, because of the multiplicitous forms of always already ongoing contact made between book and world. This is also, as I have alluded, a proposal about the way we approach and read "the Other," in a refusal to believe in, or desire, the ultimately coherency, and hence knowledge, afforded to me by my eyes. And between my eyes, and the page of the book, and between the body of "the Other," there is always already materiality – even if invisible – present, which both connects us, and places into perpetual contact with one another, but which also prevents a making-legible of literature, or "the Other" before me. If bodies can be conjoined with texts through figures of speech, we might see them as connected not in their final legibility, but in their "spilling off the page" of themselves, "in all directions." This explosion of directionality and spilling also refuse the spatiality of the "straight" (see Introduction), and thus also present queer backgrounds, foregrounds, and motion. Thus if we approach both the book and "the Other" as spilling off their own pages, in all directions, we implement queer and, I would argue, less violent practices of reading.

Reading, in Burroughs' description of the book, cannot but be a queer interaction; encounters with literature cannot but be a queer and disarrayed, always already in-contact and in-motion, confrontation. Burroughs' invites the reader to see the book in its multivalent and illegible, never fully coherent forms. As readers, we are offered with the practice of reading, looking, and seeing queerly. In all the many spillings it might offer, we might take the unreadability of the body of Burroughs' text as a metaphor for understanding the unreadability of all subjects and bodies. *Naked Lunch* opens us to understanding that "the Other," too, is spilling, multidirectional, and not appropriable through vision, not readable to the eye, not an object of information that offers itself for knowing and can be known.

Chapter 3
Saviors and Tragic Bodies: Disrupting Narratives of Protection in Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love* and Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex*

Granted that disorder spoils pattern, it also provides the material of pattern. Order implies restriction; from all possible materials, a limited selection has been made and from all possible relations a limited set has been used. So disorder by implication is unlimited, no pattern has been realized in it, but its potential for patterning is indefinite. This is why, though we seek to create order, we do not simply condemn disorder. We recognize that it is destructive to existing patterns; also that it has potentiality. It symbolizes both danger and power.

– Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 117

Governing Shapes

In the 1984 novel *Geek Love*, Katherine Dunn reveals the story of the Binewski family carnival. Dunn's novel, most renowned for its bizarre character(s), relays the tale of three generations of the Binewski family. Set in the era of the U.S. traveling carnival and freakshow, but hinging on its declining presence, Al and Lil are the oldest generation of Binewskis in *Geek Love*. Al, whose father owned the traveling show before him, falls in love when Lil bites the head off a chicken, becoming a "geek." After their marriage, Al and Lil scheme to produce a family they believe will be profitable and prosperous in the carnival industry. Consuming various drugs and radioisotopes during her pregnancy, Lil intentionally breeds a family of "freaks." Dunn's novel poses a satiric critique of normativity, marginalization, disability, and reproductive technologies. In doing so, *Geek Love* poses a challenge to what I refer to in this chapter as "narratives of protection." The troublesome margins and violent spaces of contention encountered throughout the text function as reflections on normative and capitalist value systems in the United States. The novel presents us with the violence that is often effaced in the promulgation of such value systems, and in the construction of an act of "protection" that denies its own coercion.

Coercion and violence often masquerade under the guise or name of protection. This, I argue, is a pervasive and dangerous narrative, and one whose mappings are of urgent importance. Narratives of protection work to justify violence through an erasure of coercion; they seek to construct violence toward "other" bodies as protection and safe-keeping of the "self." Violence, labor, and coercion are effaced in the name of saving or protecting not the attacked or the violated, but the attacker, the perpetrator of violence. This particular mapping emerges at a nexus of disability and queer studies, and examines the narrativization of bodies constructed as "tragic," and selves constructed as "under threat." This chapter will begin by arguing that *Geek Love* negotiates such narratives, and presents readers with characters whose claims to "saving the tragic" are refused by Dunn's exposure of their violence. I also argue that, because of these thematic concerns and critiques that arise throughout the novel, Dunn's text offers a means of reconceiving of embodiment. Its recollections of bodies, violence, and coercion that often disappear in constructions of "protection" or "saviors," offers us images that recall, and re-see, the bodies that are effaced, that must disappear, in order for such rhetorical arguments to "work."

This chapter discusses two interrelated forms of such narratives of protection. First, I discuss the shape that this fiction takes through the effacing of coercion in the name of protecting a "tragic" body from a "tragic" life, and takes on the role of savior to justify that supposed protection. Secondly, I suggest that this narrative takes form by creating an imagined coherent "self" whose coherence, legibility, and stability are jeopardized by the proximity of others; the attacks or violence that proceed from the imagined threat posed to this imagined coherent self are justified, then, through protection of the "self" from such infringement and consequent dissipation or incoherence of bodily constitution. This latter branch of such fictions also pertains to the maintenance of a norm that is also imagined as coherent, readable, and stable. Coercion

and violence are exerted in an effort to control, erase, or coerce bodies that threaten "attack" on the constitution of the nation or body-politic, as well as the norms that govern what shapes are possible, what bodies can be useful, and what lives are liveable.

In that *Geek Love* offers a critique of violence that operates under the name of "saving," I argue that it is a productive text with which to approach, and reapproach, discourses surrounding both disability and infants born intersexed. While such bodily morphologies are not the exclusive site upon which such narratives are reiterated, the particularly recurrent presence of "saving" rhetoric that proliferates around these bodies serves as a very fruitful space of examination. Jeffrey Eugenides' novel *Middlesex*, which will be discussed in the latter portion of this chapter, offers further images of violence that specifically pertain to legibility, readability, and the scrutiny of eyes. In refusing to elide the violence of the social world, the medical industry, or the supposed "saving" of normativizing surgery, *Middlesex* raises questions about visibility, legibility, and recognition of "the Other" that are the primary concern of this project. The narratives offered in both *Geek Love* and *Middlesex* serve as reminders of the violent contact that occurs between bodies – contact which is denied, erased, or disappearing in common understandings of who or what bodies are being "protected" or "saved."

Disability & Permissible Bodies in *Geek Love*

Olympia, the narrator of *Geek Love*, is a hunchbacked albino bald-headed dwarf born to Al and Lil Binewski. Elly and Iphy are conjoined twins, and born second in line to Arty. Arty, the eldest child, is born with flippers for limbs, and eventually becomes the star of the Binewski show. Arty is portrayed as egotistical, narcissistic, and manipulative. Over the course of the novel, he blossoms into the main attraction of the carnival by beginning a cult in which members go through various processes of dismemberment as a religious principle. The cult grows to be a

phenomenon, attracting followers from across the country. Chick is the youngest of the Binewski children. While Chick appears to be "normal," he has telekinetic powers. The character Miranda is born to Olympia, resulting from the telekinetically-transported (via Chick) semen of Arty. Olympia narrates her childhood and intersperses this narration of the Binewski family past with that of the present, which finds Miranda as a young woman, pursuing a career in art and debating whether or not to have her tail – the one remaining visible link between herself and her carnival ancestry – removed.

The multiple concerns with reproduction and reproductive technologies, conveyed in the purposeful consumption of drugs by Lil during pregnancy (among numerous other narrative incidents) – in order to create particular kinds of bodies – echoes relevant emerging concerns about biotechnologies and birth. Rayna Rapp and Faye Ginsburg write that, "Perhaps the starkest examples [of the way that consumer capitalism is shaping the experience of reproduction in the United States] are provided by the contemporary trend of increasingly aggressive medical intervention with the new reproductive technology of prenatal testing conjuring up a familiar specter from dystopian science fiction: that of designer babies for the market" (539-40). In *Geek Love*, Al gets his idea to "breed freaks" from a rose garden in Oregon: "It was a test garden, and the colors were . . . Designed. Striped and layered. One color inside the petal and another color outside" (9). Al's babies are, in a sense, exactly that: "designer babies." In addition to these concerns with reproductive design, narrator Olympia constantly lays claim to her authenticity as a freak, claiming that "a true freak cannot be made. A true freak must be born" (20). However, Olympia's statement is always already ironic, in that the process of "making" is intermeshed with the "being born," due to Al and Lil's "design." Additionally, Olympia becomes pregnant not through sexual intercourse, but through the delivery of Arty's semen by the telekinetic Chick.

These concerns permeate the novel, and are further explored in the family's initial reaction to the birth of Chick himself.

In *Geek Love*, the infant Chick (also called Fortunato) is born the youngest of the Binewski clan. When the family first sees Chick, he appears – disappointingly to his parents and siblings – on the surface, to be a "norm"; he doesn't have any physical deformities. Lil states: "I did everything, Al. . . . I did what you said, Al. . . . What happened, Al? How could this happen?" (65). The family decides to "get rid of it," by leaving it at the door of a gas station. According to the Binewski family hierarchy of profitable bodies, Chick is not valuable. In his normalcy, Chick does not offer to produce capital for the family, and he is thus disposable. The Binewskis fret over what was "done wrong," to produce such a useless child. At the last moment, before he is left at the gas station, Chick demonstrates his value, in exercising his telekinetic abilities. This, of course, alters the decision of the Binewskis to get rid of the child; in demonstrating his "abnormalcy," he demonstrates that he is not useless, valueless, disposable.

Rapp and Ginsburg write about handicapped children and their families, calling for new ways of imagining kinship and citizenship, examining "a world in which constructions of the body and identity are increasingly mediated by biomedical technologies" (535). Rapp and Ginsburg discuss prenatal testing for pregnant women and the decisions made about whether or not to "get rid of it." They discuss the economic difficulties that can also play a role in choosing to have a child with disabilities, especially if both parents are working. In this, however, they challenge understandings of kinship that still place the mother as primarily responsible for the disabled child. What Rapp and Ginsberg call for is new understandings of kinship, which mobilize structural changes to incorporate different kinds of bodies into the "national body." In discussing prenatal testing, they write:

> A very different discourse about disability has emerged around the proliferation of reproductive technologies, in particular prenatal testing for detectable fetal anomalies. Certain assumptions are foundational to these processes. While U.S. genetic counselors are trained to express neutrality about the choices a pregnant woman and her partner may make around amniocentesis testing, the very existence of such a technology and the offer of such tests under the terms of consumer choice are premised on the desire for normalcy and fear of unknown abnormalities. (538)

Through the stance the Binewski family takes toward Chick, Dunn makes an ironic statement with an evident parallel regarding humans born with physical anomalies. The Binewski value system, while not in replication of normative value systems of the body, most certainly parodically presents the very hierarchies by which normative value systems operate, dictating that only some bodies are worth keeping, and some lives worth living. In Rapp and Ginsburg's article, they also discuss narratives that circulate regarding the decisions of pregnant women to abort after the results of prenatal testing. In one story, the decision is described as follows: "Some people say that abortion is hate. I say my abortion was an act of love" (539). She describes her decision as an act of love because not only does it jeopardize her own life, but also would be tasking and difficult to raise a child with physical impairments; but she most emphatically claims that this is an "act of love" because of the burden that would fall on her daughter (notably, not her two sons), and "Saving Laura from that burden was an act of love" (584). Rapp and Ginsburg note that there are limitations to kinship when that kinship is understood as within the bounds of the traditional family structure, and with the burden of caretaking being primarily placed on women. These limitations give rise, they argue, to a desire

or necessity of imagining new kinds of kinship. They write that, "The creation of kinship ties between nondisabled and disabled people requires the imagining, for many families, of an unanticipated social landscape," and speaks of this as a "sense of reorientation to a place of possibility" (545). As opposed to the narrative described above, in which there is no repositioning to a place of possibility, they argue that it might be possible to re-conceive notions of "family" as well as the meaning of "disability."

I will return to this last statement, but would like to first turn back to the quotation that describes the abortion of a fetus that may be born with impairments as an "act of love." Let me first suggest that the language of love is mobilized not to support abortion, but to support abortion specifically in the case of a fetus who "threatens" to be of atypical anatomy or intellect. Sara Ahmed discusses an excerpt from the Aryan Nations' Website (which is also referenced in the Introduction to this project), which claims that their disgust, for example, with looking on mixed-raced couples, or frustrations with immigrants getting jobs "over the white citizens who built this land," is not out of hate: "No, it is not hate. It is Love" (42). Let me first state that I am in no way equating the aforementioned statement about selective abortion with the Aryan Nation statement, although selective birth and eugenics have been linked before. I am instead invested in looking at the similar constructions between their argumentations. Ahmed writes that, "Such narratives work by generating a subject that is endangered by imagined others whose proximity threatens not only to take something away from the subject (jobs, security, wealth), but to take the place of the subject. The presence of this other is imagined as a threat to the object of love" (43). In the case of the Aryan Nation Website, Ahmed notes the reproduction of the language of violation that mobilizes emotions which "stick" in order to continually create and exclude these imagined others through the construction of imaginary subjects. The closeness of

these imagined others to the imagined subject threatens to consume that imagined (and imagined to be cohering, coherent) subject. This threat is in some sense similar to "the Other" created in the "act of love" of selective abortion. The threat of the "deformed" child (as opposed to the "normal" one, whose abortion could not be "justified" in such terms) is one which threatens to take job/security/wealth from the "object of love" (in this case, the nuclear family).

David L. Braddock and Susan L. Parish note that, "Throughout Western history, disability has existed at the intersection between the particular demands of a given impairment, society's interpretation of the impairment, and the larger political and economic context of disability" (11). Essentially, they present impairment as a condition of biology, while disability is a social and historical construction, not appearing as a social category until after the 18th century (12). In a historical reading of "disability," though, they do discuss how deformity has been treated in various stages of history, including ancient Greece and Rome, in which,

> infanticide was practiced for economic reasons when there were too many children. In Sparta, however, children born with obvious physical deformities were put to death regardless of a family's means. Spartan law mandated the practice of killing newborns who had born with deformities, while there is some limited evidence that Athenians may have been more inclined to raise such children. (15)

In this context, Braddock and Parish also note that it was often believed that a child born with deformities was sometimes seen as a warning from the gods; they cite H. Stiker: "an aberrancy within the corporeal order is an aberrancy in the social order" (qtd. in Braddock and Parish,15). The aberrant corporeal body must be "sacrificed" in order to maintain the appearance, the surface, of an imagined social order. The body was, in this case, again imagined as a threat to the

"object of love" – a body of citizenship, which implicitly excludes that body from inclusion within that "kinship" – it is a body which is not loveable, which other bodies cannot and must not bear a responsibility towards, because their proximity to that body threatens an imaginary constitution of bodily integrity. That body is assigned a culturally constructed meaning, and a "sense of reorientation to a place of possibility" is foreclosed as that meaning is given stasis in the death of the body, the sacrifice to maintenance of social order, supposed legibility and coherence. In this case, the illegible body must be made "invisible." The anomalous body must be effaced, because it threatens to make visible the instability of social order and meanings; the sign must be immobilized through death in order to make meaning, and this forecloses the possibility of new meaning-making and new forms of kinship before it can even be imagined. Making meaning (the wrath of the gods) makes legible that illegible, and allows the reminder of the moment of ambiguity to be exhausted, extinguished, in the elimination of the potentiality of such a body, and the many meanings it could make in flourishing, in being permitted to be possible.

I would like to return, in connection with this, to the role of the mother in her "act of love." I want to make clear the social, historical, and political power that in part shapes this language, and in part shapes this orientation toward the impaired body. Disability studies theorist Adrienne Asch criticizes bioethics, and in her critique, the shaping of such orientation is particularly clear. She suggests that the field of bioethics, in determining what lives are "worth" living or "worth saving":

> fails to recognize the extent to which disadvantages experienced by people with disabilities arise through society's lack of accommodation to the different methods of performing valued activities such as learning, communicating,

> moving, or taking in the world. On the contrary, say disability studies scholars and disability politics. First, life with disability is not the unremitting tragedy portrayed in medical and bioethics literature. Second, the culprit is not biological, psychic, or cognitive equipment but the social, institutional, and physical world in which people with impairments must function – a world designed with the characteristics and needs of the nondisabled majority in mind. An impaired arm becomes a manual disability or social handicap only because of the interaction of a particular physiology with a specific social, legal, and attitudinal environment. (300)

Although I will turn back to the important intervention that disability studies makes in claims contesting the "unremitting tragedy" of being born with physical impairments, I would like to focus further here on the contribution disabilities studies has made to reconsidering the social and institutional world which has failed, and fails, to accommodate the shapes of particular bodies. This failure is the same as that discussed by Rapp, in the failure of imagining and reimagining ways of kinship which are not tied to the biological, and imagining the shape of the family in a way which does not designate the mother/daughter as bearer of the "burden" – a burden which must fall on the female body alone. It is not, after all, Laura's mother who creates the social and institutional world which frames her own rhetoric; when she states that it is done "out of love," it is precisely the social, political, and institutional forces which shape the morphology of atypical bodies as inaccomodatable, and leave Laura's mother little choice in terms of either discourse or in the prospects of imagining livable futurity. If the social and institutional dynamics that shape how spaces – from cars to classrooms, from dinner tables to coffee shops – are constructed, these dynamics also effect how objects take shape – around the

idea of particular "normal" shapes. And these ideological shapings in turn effect the medical industry's consideration of who or what bodies are permissible, and what lives are "worth living."

"Tragedy" and "Saviors" in *Geek Love*

Olympia, the narrator of *Geek Love*, does not see her albino, dwarfed, and bald-headed body as a tragedy. As an adult, accompanied by her friend Miss Lick, she narrates the feeling of eyes upon her at the swimming pool. The passage is worth quoting at length, as it exemplifies both the discourses of "tragedy" and the role of the "savior" in such fictions of protection:

> With my eyes closed I can feel the children looking at me. They have stopped their games for a moment in the shallow end where they can watch me. I too am at the shallow end, sitting on the steps in water up to my nipples. Miss Lick is plowing up and down the pool in her ponderous and dutiful laps. The children's eyes are crawling on me. If I opened my eyes they would smile at me and wave. They are just old enough to be embarrassed at their normality in front of me.
>
> Because I am Olympia Binewski and am accustomed to the feel of eyes moving on me, I turn slightly on my submerged seat and reach down as though examining my toes under water. This angle will allow the children a clear profile view of my hump [. . .]
>
> But Miss Lick is standing in the shallow end, glowering down at the children. I can hear her harshness. "Are you swimming laps or fooling around?" And four little creatures do not speak but kick off from the wall and chase each other down the far lane of the pool to escape.

> The light is pale green and moves on Miss Lick's enormous shoulders and chest. She turns and nods at me—a quick twitch of tension at her mouth that stands for a smile. She is telling me that she has saved me from the stares of idiots and that I am safe with her to guard me. (325-326)

Although Olympia realizes that these childrens' eyes are upon her body, she does not express shame; rather, she angles her body so that the children may see her body more fully. Aware of their gaze, she chooses how to be seen. Olympia does not feel that her body is a tragedy, but Miss Lick demands that Olympia's body signify this tragedy as she takes on the role of savior. She silences the desire of Olympia – who shifts her body to be seen more fully – in that her response deems this desire impossible. When Olympia acknowledges that Miss Lick is playing the role of savior, it becomes clear that Miss Lick both misunderstands and misinterprets how Olympia feels about her body (that it is not a tragedy) or what Olympia desires, which is "abnormal." It is both the tragedy and the savior in this excerpt that become very useful to interrogate. Miss Lick exercises a choice in the name of saving Olympia from her own tragic body, but Olympia neither considers her body tragic nor believes she needs saving. There is a violence exerted in this silencing and "saving."

Miss Lick continually asserts herself as a savior throughout the course of *Geek Love*. Olympia seeks out and befriends Miss Lick because of the interaction between Miranda (Olympia's daughter) and Miss Lick. Because Miranda is considering Miss Lick's offer to pay Miranda to have her tail removed, Olympia wishes to intercede and prevent the proposed surgery and compensation. As Olympia comes to find out, Miss Lick has made it her mission to (supposedly) save women from themselves. In Miss Lick's high school days, she knew a girl named Linda – a cheerleader, an "average student," and the "princess for every dance and

festival" (157) during their sophomore year. Linda, according to Miss Lick, spent her time wastefully on boys and stereotypically feminine activities, neglecting her education or any activities that Miss Lick believes might possibly benefit the successful development of a career and worthwhile life. Linda's life changed, Miss Lick relays to Olympia, when the girl was burned and excessively scarred in a house fire. Linda's appearance in the aftermath of the fire results in her turning toward other objects, such as her education, with her passions. Eventually becoming a chemical engineer, Linda's story inspires Miss Lick's seeking out of "projects."

Born into wealth, Miss Lick's father owned a successful frozen dinner company, and she eventually takes over the business. In her monetary excess, she takes it upon herself to offer women compensation in exchange for the mutilation of body parts that, to her, signify the sexual bodily object that contributes to a woman's distraction from education or career success. Unbeknownst to the women who are watched and eventually approached with financial offers, Miss Lick videotapes her "projects" before approaching them, and also tapes them during and after their surgeries and/or mutilations. Miss Lick, not knowing the narrator's familial relationship to one of her potential "projects" (Miranda), shows Olympia some of the videos she has taken. Miss Lick narrates the video of her first "project," Carina, to Olympia:

> This is Carina. Half black, half Italian. Poor as shit. A dropout but she tested high in aptitudes. Her father disappeared when she was five. Mother a welfare lush picking up a little extra by peddling ass in the dark to johns too old to care or too drunk to notice what she looks like. Specializes in head since she lost her last teeth. She used to refuse dirt trackers but she had to give in on that a few years before this film was taken. Looks like Carina's headed the same way, doesn't it? (159)

Miss Lick offers Carina a way out of the economically depressed life into which she was born. Offering her significant monetary gain, and opportunity for an education, Miss Lick seems to have a penchant for preying particularly on the disadvantaged. In exchange for the economic and educational opportunities offered by Miss Lick, Carina must mutilate her body, so as to (according to Lick) eliminate the supposedly seductive life of prostitution to which Carina's mother has become subject. Miss Lick determines that it is not economic deprivation that prompts a resort to prostitution, but rather the inevitable futurity of a woman who is normatively attractive. Lick's certainty about the positive results of her own actions demonstrates the tragedy/savior narrative that she continues to articulate. But what must be disavowed, in order for Miss Lick's argument to hold, is the violence that is exercised in the name of "saving" these women. Although Miss Lick does not show Olympia the act of mutilation itself, as she does not yet entirely trust the narrator, Lick shows Olympia the results of Carina's financial exchange with Lick: "Her face is corrugated with deep purple gutters of scar. Her lips are twisted, nostrils distorted. Only her eyes and something in the barely discernible bone beneath the raddled flesh seem familiar" (160). Miss Lick then informs Olympia that acid was utilized to mutilate Carina's face. Convinced of her own self-righteousness, her own acts of saving, Miss Lick explains that, "It's a tax write-off. My girls go down as handicapped. No trouble establishing fake accident reports. Private nursing. I'm a bona fide charitable organization with rehabilitation as my main goal. It's the truth too" (165). Miss Lick, whose coercive "projects," are rhetorically legitimated through an erasure of the violence that is done to the bodies towards whom she supposedly offers charity and rehabilitation (rather than paid mutilation), is assured of her own status as do-gooder, savior, generous provider of both resources and well-being.

"Tragedy" and "Saviors": Protecting "the Other" from the World

Because of the discourses of tragedy that so vehemently persist around the subjects of both disability and infants born intersexed, *Geek Love* offers us an approach to resisting and challenging the discourses of protection that are continually reiterated in the name of such bodies. This is not to conflate impaired and intersexed bodies, but rather to address the similar ways in which these bodies are constructed and represented through dominant ideological rhetoric. Often the discourse that surrounds both disability and infants whose biological sex is considered ambiguous continues to suggest that being born as such is a tragedy – is a life less livable, or less worth living. This works to justify many of the coercive or violent acts performed on infants who do not map onto normative societal cartographies of the body. Doctors, parents, and others usually defend such decisions as exercising a choice in the name of protecting the child from the cruelty of society. Like Miss Lick, they consider themselves saviors; they presume tragedy on a body, and then act accordingly with that presumption.

Anne Fausto-Sterling suggests that few "ambiguous" infants would make it into adulthood in "sexually diverse form." She argues that, while the medical industry seeks to make legible sexes, the decision for surgery from parents or guardians is often made out of a "genuinely humanitarian concern":

> Almost at once such infants are entered into a program of hormonal and surgical management so that they can slip quietly into society as "normal" heterosexual males or females. I emphasize that the motive is in no way conspiratorial. The aims of the policy are *genuinely humanitarian*, reflecting the wish that people be able to "fit in" both physically and psychologically. (469, Emphasis mine)

Through the rhetoric of tragedy – concerns about locker rooms and men's/women's restrooms, distrust of the terrible and terrifying world of judges that await in classrooms – the choice is

often made through the rhetoric of saving, or protecting. Saviors are created rhetorically, in the name of giving a good life, or saving a body from the possibility of a life of shunning, teasing; or, further, saving one from the impossibility of a "productive" and "normal" life. And while these "aims" may be "genuinely humanitarian," demonstrating a desire for a "good" and "normal" life, such aims also transform an act of coercion into the act of a savior. Such rhetoric continues to foster an inhospitable social world for "ambiguous bodies" – continuing to insist that coercion is both the reasonable and *humanitarian* solution. Judith Butler writes that the intersex movement

> resistance to coercive surgery moreover calls for an understanding that infants with intersexed conditions are part of the continuum of human morphology and ought to be treated with the presumption that their lives are and will be not only livable, but also occasions for flourishing. The norms that govern idealized human anatomy thus work to produce a differential sense of who is human and who is not, which lives are livable, and which are not. This differential works for a wide range of disabilities as well. (4)

What Butler calls for, like Adrienne Asch and many disability studies theorists, is to cease marking impaired or intersexed infants as defective – to cease seeing such bodies as less than human, and assuming that a life in such a body is a tragedy. Such discourses rely on "norms that govern idealized human anatomy" and continue to reiterate those norms and idealizations of the body. Asch notes that there is a "gap in understanding that persists between people with and without disabilities regarding the potential for life with disability to be acceptable, rewarding, or as rewarding as the lives of people who do not report impairments" (301). This gap persists, Asch suggests, in that people who report impairments do not consider their lives defective, less

whole, less fulfilling, while the dominant notion about such impairments is precisely that it is such – an “unremitting tragedy” (300). Asch continues that,

> When people with disabilities report unhappiness or dissatisfaction (a minority in every study), the sources resemble sources of unhappiness in the lives of nondisabled people – inadequacies in financial security, work, or social and personal relationships [. . .] sometimes impairment-related factors, such as pain and fatigue, contribute to unsatisfying relationships or to the difficulty of holding a job, but the frustrations come from difficulty in incorporating the impairment into existing interpersonal and institutional life. (301)

Asch reiterates that life with disability is not the tragedy that dominant ideologies, and medical institutions, claim it to be. And when one does “report” feelings of unhappiness with one’s life, they are either similar to those unhappinesses which are reported by those who do not possess such physical impairments, or otherwise suggest a discontent that pertains not to their own biology or morphology, but the shapes of society and institutions that do not accommodate the contours of that body. This is similar to the “tragedy” continually assumed on the body of an intersexed infant. But what if compulsory shapes, and shapings, of bodies, were understood to be the tragedy, rather than understanding tragedy to lie in the “failure” of a body to reiterate the norms that structure “proper” and “whole” biology and anatomy – norms that seek to keep the “same shapes” (only “similar” due to the labor which has gone into producing a “coherent surface”) so that the push and pull of such illegibilities do not overtake what may appear on the surface to be distinguishable shapes? What if coercion were the tragedy, rather than the bodies that normativity calls to be coerced?

Protecting the Legible Body of Norms: Protecting the Coherent “Self”

Margins are very troublesome and violent spaces of contention throughout *Geek Love*. Issues of containment, and fears of contact, permeate the novel. At an early juncture in the novel, Lil decides to venture out into the world outside the carnival – to the shopping center – with the Binewski children. Arty foresees the danger that might be involved in this escapade. He asks Lil: "do you think it's a good idea for all of us to go?" (56). When the family reaches their destination, a nearby supermarket, Arty's fears are confirmed in the actions of Vern Bogner, a grocer from another local supermarket. Dunn introduces Vern's character through a commentary on his desire for stability and organization:

> Vern Bogner had been produce manager at the Seal Bay Supermarket for five years, and assistant for three years before that. As Vern explained in detail years later, it was a time when his whole life had begun to slide. Despite his experience, oranges had always been hard to stack. He had built mounds and pyramids of Floridas and tangerines and big and little inny and outy navels by the million but he had never been plagued by so many rolls and drops and avalanches as in the past few months. (57)

Things for Vern, as the details reveal, have begun to "slide." Disorder prevails. Not only does he have family problems – his wife and children don't seem to like him – but even objects themselves, which should be orderly, are sliding. Through Vern's frustrations with the inability to stack oranges, both his desire for control and lack thereof become apparent. The incapacity for organization in a space so meticulously organized and categorized as a supermarket, the inability to maintain order wholly contradicts the stabilizing nature of the supermarket. The rolls, drops, and avalanches prevent Vern from being in control even of a stack of fruits. Vern's desire for order, in conjunction with the impossibility of properly or perfectly stacking his

oranges – or controlling his life, or maintaining a proper nuclear family – operates as a precursor to his confrontation with the Binewski family. Upon seeing Lil, presently pregnant with Chick, step out of her van with her children, Dunn narrates Vern's response:

> Then the things crawled out of the van and began milling around the tall pregnant woman. Vern stared as the wheelchair was unfolded and the small lumpy bald thing helped the limbless worm thing up into it. Then he reached back for the 30.06 and smoothly, still staring, pumped a round into the chamber (58).

Although the carnival is mobile, the space remains separated from mainstream society. The threat posed by the Binewski "things" when they move from their "appropriate" place into the space of the mainstream (in this case, exemplified in the shopping center), the imaginary lines drawn between the "norm" and the "freak" are disrupted. The threat posed by the violation of these boundaries provokes a violent reaction from Vern Bogner. These margins, and marginalized bodies, pose a threat to Vern's sense of separation and stability, and this threat must be contained. Their appearance prompts Vern to "pump a round into the chamber" and fire at the Binewskis. The children are described as "things" that "crawl," and Arty is described as a worm. Dunn utilizes this language to portray Vern as constructing the "otherness" of the Binewski children – Vern needs to distinguish between himself by making the "freaks" into insects and objects. Judith Butler suggests that such violent responses to difference, to those who do not conform to norms, "proceeds from the anxious and rigid belief that a sense of world and a sense of self will be radically undermined if such a being, uncategorizable, is permitted to live within the social world" (34). While Butler's critique applies specifically to intersexed or transgendered individuals, the concept is (and I think Butler would agree) very much applicable here. Butler suggests that the violent response to "the Other" proceeds specifically in response to

fears of uncategorizability or illegibility. The violent response, she suggests, emerges when one wishes to shore up and recognize "the Other," to make his face legible, and fails to do so (under the presumption that bodies are in fact, and can be made, legible to begin with). She continues that, "The violent response is the one that does not ask, and does not seek to know. It wants to shore up what it knows, to expunge what threatens it with not-knowing, what forces it to reconsider the presuppositions of its world, their contingency, their malleability" (34-35). Vern's reaction proceeds thus from a sense of self, and a sense of order, he believes to be endangered by the presence of the Binewskis in the social world of the supermarket. As is evidenced by the supermarket, Arty's fear of "freaks" infiltrating the social world is one that proves warranted, as the family is shot at by a man who believes he is doing humanity a favor by attempting to rid the social world of the Binewski bodies.

Arty's initial wariness suggests not a fear simply of a "freak" appearing outside of his bounds of the freakshow, but specifically a fear of "freaks" appearing *collectively* outside the bounds of their assigned, contained space. Mary Douglas writes that, "All margins are dangerous. If they are pulled this way or that the shape of fundamental experience is altered. Any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins" (150). The vulnerability of the constitution and readability of norms themselves are endangered by the proximity, presence, and threat of reproduction posed for Vern by the presence of the Binewski family. Similarly, Vern's constitution of self and the readability of his norms are threatened by the potentiality discussed in Douglas' quotation that begins this chapter. Disorder spoils pattern, like Vern's sliding oranges, but also provides the material for pattern. The oranges are not naturally or essentially ordered, stacked (neither is the supermarket), and the movement of margins (or marginalized bodies) into normative spaces threatens to reveal that essential disorder, that disorder that precedes its

construction and patterning, its stacking and organization. It threatens to reveal that norms themselves are constructed, not essentially coherent or legible.

Vern Bogner's violent response, like the violent response described by Butler, wishes to expunge what might force one to "reconsider" norms themselves. The collective nature of the Binewski family's appearance in a realm reserved for "norms" jeopardizes that norm itself, threatening to overtake, to become a majority. After the shooting, Vern sees a pregnant woman (not Lil) at the door of the patrol car. Upon seeing her, Dunn writes that, "The window glass vibrated, telling him '. . . solutely right, right, you were absolutely . . . and she was pregnant *again* . . . right . . . you did the . . . decent . . . right" (61). While the pregnant woman may or not be trying to convey this response, Vern reads her facial expression as an approval of his own actions. That this woman is also pregnant suggests that her approval is connected, at least in Vern's mind, to Lil's pregnancy – and his desire to put a stop to it. What Lil threatens to reproduce is the "abnormal." In the absolution of his act – his belief that he was absolutely right, that it was the decent thing to do, since Lil was pregnant yet again – Vern expresses the threat held in this reproduction, and reiteration, of the abnormal. Since, as Butler has noted in regard to gender, norms are performatively reproduced, when something "other" threatens to reproduce, it threatens the persistence of those norms themselves – threatens to "submerge" the norm itself, and also to reveal the disorder that precedes its patterning.

Another instance in which the novel touches on this theme is when Arty suggests that the freakshow-goers only watch him (he has flippers for limbs, and performs a sideshow act from an aquarium) because they feel safe – they do not fear his jumping into their laps: "The tank made him exotic but safe. 'They can relax,' Arty theorized, 'because I know I'm not going to jump up into their laps.' (Arty tended to be snide about laps, not having one of his own)" (50). Again is

present a fear of proximity, contact, and submersion. While the stage (or here, the tank) erects a clear delineation between the norm and the freak, the norm is jeopardized by the "infringement" and proximity of "the Other" or the margin, to the norm – it threatens to deconstruct that line, to destroy the self/other split that is guaranteed by the stage or, in Arty's case, the tank. The tank promises a distance, a containment, that "protects" the body of the norm and the norm itself, and promises to keep that norm legible and delineable. Within the confines of the tank, the "abnormal"/the margin does not threaten to violate its space, seep out, or push and pull normative embodiment and norms themselves. Thus, Vern's violence is absolved in the erasure of his own violence, and the danger he presents, and in the articulation of a danger to the body of the "self," the body of the norm, and the national body-politic.

In the scene that follows the shooting, the children are taken to the hospital. The description of touch and repulsion at the site of contact between the medical personnel and the children reveals the denial of that very contact: "The nurses were not as disgusted as the doctors but they were giggling at each other and moving jerkily [. . .] She hated to touch me. I could feel it and my stomach got cold inside. She edged around the table, pushing her finger into the sides of my hump but avoiding the thick bandage at the crest" (61-62). The nurses and doctors feel a repulsion not just by the sight of the Binewski children, but seem to be particularly abhorred by having to touch their bodies, by the prospect of making (visible) contact. The most interesting description, however, falls when Olympia describes the thick bandage which is notably at the "crest" of the hump. The position of the "crest" indicates the most prominent or jutting part of the hump. That the woman is unable to touch the crest reflects the fear of "contamination" through this de-formed body and her own. In addition, the woman seems wary due to the place of the bandage, the wound, a site of possible transfer of bodily fluids where "contamination"

could be possible (this "contamination" not referring to any disease, but in the perceived disease[40]).

Merleau-Ponty suggests that it is through touch that we are linked to the visible world around us, and that touch and visibility are caught up in an intertwining – that the tangible and visible worlds press upon each other and shape one another. But he focuses here particularly on the sense of touch as that which connects us to the world around us. It is through touching that we are touched and through being touched that we are touching. In between myself and what I touch, he argues, "there must exist some relationship by principle, some kinship, according to which they are not only, like the pseudo pods of the amoeba, vague and ephemeral deformations of the corporeal space, but the initiation to and the opening upon a tactile world" (133). The "kinship" that "*must"* exist between these relations, however, is not necessarily one of simply "touching." Touch is not immune to the social, political, and economic conditionings of different ways of touching and being touched; because contact always already exists between all bodies does not alleviate the very particular ways in which some bodies are more vulnerable to exploitative contact. The nurses and doctors do not want to touch these "freakish" bodies because they fear the flesh of their own hands being in contact with the children's bodies, and vice versa. In reality, these bodies are not cut off from one another, but are mutually implicating and interrelated, always already in contact. Their "kinship" is undeniable; except that kinship *is (violently) denied*, and becomes something that is not kinship, but violence. Like Arty's show-goers, who are content because he is not jumping into their laps, the contact between self and other must be contained. But the fear of coming into contact with "the Other" presupposes that these bodies are not already in-contact. The desire to ward off the reality of the "intertwinings" of touch produces a containment that functions in order to "protect," but whose body is truly

being protected?

When Vern shoots at the Binewski family, he does so out of a supposed desire for "protection." He is protecting the body of the social and the shape of norms by alleviating bodies that threaten to alter the contours of the social and norms. In Vern's mind, he is a savior; he is protecting from the reiteration and the submersion of the "self" (at once individual, national, and norms themselves) by "the Other," and acts in a desire to eliminate that which threatens the reiteration of "the same." The attacker justifies his actions under the name of being the attacked, and his own violence is effaced by his rhetorical construction. Vern legitimates his act of violence only through an erasure of the bodies of the Binewski children. He denies them their humanness, in suggesting that they are "things," and referring to Arty as a worm. Through his non-recognition of their humanness, he elides and erases their bodies and becomes the "savior" through the refusal to acknowledge the violence he inflicts upon them. If he acknowledges his violence, and the threat to the bodily constitutions of the Binewski family, his self-construction as savior can no longer operate. The violent contact occurring between the body of Vern and the bodies of the Binewskis must remain invisible for his logical equation to hold.

Menacing Bodies: Protecting Self from "the Other" & Saving "the Other" from Tragedy

Martin S. Pernick describes the debates that waged in the U.S. following the public disclosure of Dr. Harry J. Haiselden's decision, in 1915, to let "Baby Bollinger" die because of the infant's multiple impairments. Pernick suggests that, "Haiselden's crusade did not combine logically incompatible goals, but it did appeal to fundamentally irreconcilable emotions: His supporters were motivated by a jarring combination of compassion and hatred" (94). The language of love and compassion came to permeate the discourses that surrounded the deaths of

what Pernick refers to as “defectives,” a term that worked in conjunction with discourses of eugenics that Pernick both exposes and critiques. The language of love operated within the rhetoric of a narrative of protection – protection of the national body-politic as well as protection over the cruel social world that awaited the infant should he be “saved.” Thus, the savior became such not in “saving” itself, but by the transformation of coercive shapings that aimed to efface that coercion. Argumentative constructions, which still permeate dominant rhetoric in the U.S., relied on the rhetorical eclipse and erasure of coercion through the language of compassion and mercy, through the alleviation of a tragedy. At the same time, and in the same breath, they spoke to the fears of different shapes overtaking the shape of the imagined national body. Pernick exemplifies this linguistic and logistical tactic:

> Without a word of transition, Helen Keller [who lived a life with impairments until the age of 88] described the Bollinger baby as ‘the hopeless being spared from a life of misery. No one cares about that pitiful, useless lump of flesh.’ Clarence Darrow’s comments revealingly captured the full ambiguity of this appeal. ‘Chloroform unfit children. Show them the same mercy that is shown beasts that are no longer fit to live.’ (96)

In Helen Keller’s first sentence, the letting die of an impaired infant is an act of mercy, the act of a savior, protecting the infant from a tragic life in a tragic body, and from the path of persecution that lies in wait. Her second sentence contradicts the first, and explicitly articulates the eclipse that occurs in the creation of a savior in this rhetorical construction. The first sentence presumes a position of caretaker, relieving the infant of the “life of misery” out of love or compassion. The second sentence contradicts that claim to protection, in that it states outright that, “no one cares.” In calling the infant’s body a “useless lump of flesh,” Keller suggests that this body fails

to fall into the norms of permissible bodily shapes – those possible bodies that power recognizes as human. The body fails to meet normative (and here, explicitly "able-bodied") molds in its designation as a "lump," – it does not map, conform, and take shape, within the dominant national imaginary. Thus this body also fails to fulfill its capacity as productive body in the capitalist system that devalues the body it cannot utilize for its own ends – the body becomes "useless."[3] What constitutes a "useful" life is shaped by the economic, social, and normative mappings of how bodies, and lives, should be shaped, and how they can be made useful or lead "fulfilling" lives. Clarence Darrow's suggestion makes a similar construction, though he presents his contradiction within a single sentence (rather than Helen Keller's two sentences). The infant is being shown mercy at the same time that it no longer remains within the domains of the human; the compassion articulated in this argument collapses when that mercy is only mercy toward the beast. Both Keller and Darrow suggest, perhaps much less subtly than contemporary narratives of protection, that the "tragic" body is in need of caretaking and protection; and language of protection works to efface the compassion-less response of refusing to imagine a futurity of flourishing, or possibility.

Narratives of protection, which construct the body of the attacker as violated, and exercising violence in the name of self-protection, also emerge in the discourses surrounding the Bollinger baby (as well as other infants who had been permitted to "let die" in this time period), specifically in the language utilized by Dr. Haiselden himself. Of Haiselden, Pernick writes: "In a particularly striking passage in his autobiography, he recalled that he first became aware of the retarded when, at the age of eight, he joined the gang of boys who regularly assaulted 'Crazy Mary,' the village idiot [. . .] Even a child [Haiselden wrote] 'instinctively sees the menace in these wretched beings and adopts this means of fighting against it'" (97). Thus the beatings that

Pernick suggests were part of Haiselden's regimens of "defense" against "Crazy Mary," are justified, in his rhetorical construction, in the name of "fighting against" a "menace" that poses a threat. His justification works more subtly (than Keller's or Darrow's argument) to efface his own coercion and violence in the name of "protection." Although the "menace" posed by the existence of such a body is not directly named, the threat indicated is clearly articulated.

Judith Butler asks us to consider what provokes violence toward intersexed or transgendered individuals, and her question resonates with the argument constructed by Haiselden – in both the "menace" which might be posed, and the violent response that proceeds in the name of "protection." As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Butler argues that such a violent response issues without asking, and without the desire for knowing; "It wants to shore up what it knows, to expunge what threatens it with not-knowing, what forces it to reconsider the presuppositions of its world, their contingency, their malleability"(34-35). Thus, it is the norm itself, and the appearance of that norm as both natural and immobile, that is being protected. A violent division between self and other is enforced, in the name of protecting the body of the self from the infringement of "the Other," and in the name of protecting the body of that norm, which threatens to be revealed as contingent, malleable. The "menace" of this body resides in its potential to remind one that all bodies – individual and national, as well as the "body" of norms themselves – as ever-fluctuating and incoherent. These coercive medical practices perpetuate themselves through themselves; it is a coercion that bases itself on itself, reiterating and reiterating again. What is in jeopardy with the presence of bodies considered "ambiguous" or "shapeless" – "lumps of flesh" as Helen Keller called them – is that they threaten to suggest the ambiguity of all embodiments: their tenuousness, their intershapings, their collapsible edges. With intersexed infants, as well as "deformed" infants,[41] the medical industry (in operation with

the norms that govern it) aims to *visually distinguish* to create a distinction between "one" (the "self") and "the other" ("the Other") and to *visually extinguish* bodies – or the signs that some bodies might bear – which oppose and challenge those moments of distinction with moments of ambiguity; *these discourses of power work to erase the "work"* involved in *extinguishing in order to distinguish*, in order to make, assert, and reiterate legible biological (genital) shapes. Such labor/coercion is continually exercised in the name of maintaining "coherent" sexes, norms, and bodies – to organize, and police.

***Middlesex* and Betweenness**

In order to give form to a mass of pluralities, infants born intersexed are, much more often than not, surgically altered to fit the format of the norm. The incoherence of both embodiment and norms themselves are effaced, through labor, to produce "smooth," distinguishable surfaces. Jeffrey Eugenides' contemporary novel, *Middlesex*, is a story about migration, transition, and biology. Its theoretical frames fluctuate, gravitating between firm and unstable conceptions of identity. Calliope/Cal Stephanides, born with ambiguous genitalia, is raised as a female until the age of fifteen, when an accident lands Cal in the hospital, where her "condition" is at last discovered. The repercussions of this revelation are Calliope's undergoing multiple scientific evaluations and gazes, and her eventual decision to run away from home. In departing the Stephanides' home, Cal decides that he wants to live as a male, and continues to alter his appearance in ways that he sees fitting of this change. *Middlesex* might not present an ideal narrative for reconstructing the ways we understand sex and gender, but its humanization of a body, life, and desire that are continually denied under the guise of protection in dominant narrative constructions, offer us a brief glimpse at the body that is often effaced in order for

dominant narratives to legitimate the coercive action taken on bodies that must be "fixed," supposedly for their own good.

The narrative presented by Eugenides takes us back generations, introducing us to Calliope's grandparents – Lefty and Desdemona – a brother and sister who flee Turkey, and become man and wife on the boat to the United States. Problematically, Cal's "deformity" is traceable – it has origins in genetics and can be calculated back. The results of an incestuous relationship are eventually carried down through biology, and come to fruition and visibility in Cal's genitalia. Debra Shostak suggests that *Middlesex* demonstrates a failure of theoretical interventions in the imagination or imaginary of how we understand bodies to be, or the possibility of what bodies might become. Practicality, Shostak argues, gets in the way of Cal (or anyone else in *Middlesex*, for that matter) existing as a truly "hybrid" being. Because the social world, she argues, does not provide real or physical spaces for such hybridity, theory loses its ability to be exercised in reality: "Something happens to Cal's ancestors and something happens to his chromosomes, and these two events, at once discrete and inextricable, motivate the plotting and limit the 'who' and the 'what' that Cal is" (385). While this is true of the novel, the narrator (an older Cal, in his forties) often contradicts his own positions regarding a futurity forewritten by genetics and always already traceable to a defined point of origin. Early in the novel, Cal reflects on his family lineage: "And here I am now, sketching it all out for you; dutifully oozing feminine glue, but also with a dull pain in my chest, because I realize that genealogies tell you nothing" (72). Rather than professing a religious belief in geneaology, constructing it as a pure line of cause and effect, explicating who and what one is now or might be in the future, Cal dismisses genealogy as an impossibility of the revelatory. It discloses and explains nothing to him; it does not trace him back to a prior point of non-contact, even if the

story continues to gravitate back to the pure past that preceded the arrival of the monstrous (Cal's "defect," inherited through incest).

Shostak insists that both Cal and Eugenides are constrained by the language available to them, and that existing in the realms of hybridity is impossible, in that the social world continues to delimit how one can viably exist in a body not identified and identifying as male or female. In turning to Judith Butler's *Undoing Gender*, Shostak suggests that remaining "unintelligible," within the context of the "maps of legibility"[42] prescribed and preceding the coming into being of a body, poses a danger to Cal. Shostak contests Butler, arguing that when Butler suggests that there may be benefits to remaining unintelligible, unreadable (if legibility is governed by social norms), Shostak notes that, "Clearly, Butler favors critique through resistance to the social imaginary. Yet there is much risk to 'remaining less than intelligible,' since the unintelligible 'I' is de facto not stabilized by social recognition" (399). Rejecting the possibility of truly intervening in the social imaginary, Shostak emphasizes the risk posed by the cusp of betweenness in a world inhospitable to those bodies which do not or cannot find a place on the "maps of legibility" that dictate who and who is not human. Many theorists – Anne Fausto-Sterling and Butler among them – have suggested the creation of, and proliferation of, identity categories that permit bodies to exist without conforming to the instituted and constructed binary of male/female. Shostak rejects such possibilities of intervention, arguing that, "The very metaphors Eugenides fastens upon thus reveal the problem of imagination posed by the story he wishes to tell. The challenge that the novel's mode of realism finally poses is this: how to represent what *can be*, practically speaking, rather than what *may be* theoretically possible" (386).[43] Certainly Cal, and perhaps even Eugenides, may not succeed in escaping, per se, the categorical imperatives of male and female, and Cal does finally assert his own inexorable

maleness. Yet the continued exertions of violence on Cal's body and the concomitant critique of the medical industry and parental choice for surgery – and the bloody riots and wars that factor as the backdrop to Calliope's tale[44] – refuse to elide the violence done in the name of those binaries, specifically violence through vision, and desire for intelligibility and legibility.

Shostak rightfully points out that Eugenides constructs Cal's bodily shame through visual registers, and suggests that the protagonist, "can assume the position of an intact subject only insofar as her body remains disguised to view; as Sifuentes writes, 'a fluid biological identity can only be permitted as long as it remains a discreet invisibility – as a hormonal or chromosomal possibility that cannot be directly seen' (148). Any exposure of her interstitial anatomy would threaten Callie's hold on a sexual category" (402). As Shostak argues, Cal's body must remain invisible, because the social world makes no room for the betweenness, the "middlesex," that is revealed with the visibility of her genitalia – its *true* visibility, its ultimate exposure. "Eugenides underscores," Shostak continues, "how the monstrous body must be kept invisible" (402). When Cal keeps her genitalia hidden, or when people do not look, or cannot see, Calliope escapes the gaze of "the Other" which would exclude Calliope from recognition, from being recognized and validated as recognizably human in the categories available within prevailing social norms. Because of this pervasive necessity of hiding, disguising, or the exercise of faulty vision that structure Cal's body, Shostak suggests that the middle, hybridity, or betweenness, are in fact impossibilities – legacies of theory that have no practical application for those bodies marginalized *because of* their interstitiality. Yet even if Cal fails to create a newly thinkable category of what might be considered the "human," or what shapes the human might possibly take, Cal eventually declares himself male *and* refuses surgery. While Cal asserts a holistic male sex, and in this sense does not remain in the space of "betweenness," he also refuses to define his

maleness by the shape that his genitalia does or does not take.[45] In deciding against a surgery to make his genitalia appear *either* more categorically male or female, Cal still does eventually choose to live with a genitalia that is considered "ambiguous," that appears in-between, in the middle.

Although Cal might also not entirely refuse regimes of visuality – that dictate that the body is ultimately and infinitely readable, that otherness and difference are detectable, with the exercise of a scrutinizing eye – *Middlesex* does, yet, present us with instances in which the violence of such visual regimes that demand scrutiny and, accordingly, assert the legibility of "the Other," is manifest in Cal's world. After Cal has run away, he finds himself sleeping in a park in San Francisco. He wakes up to find two men attempting to thieve what they can from "the camp" (475). Searching his pockets, they come across his school ID, and realize that Cal, who appears to be male, is in fact (according to his identification, and his appearance on the ID card) female. In realizing this, the men then ask if Cal is holding out, and pull down his pants, presumably in order to rape him (if the him appears, upon their inspection, to be a female). But in taking down his pants, one of the men points a flashlight at his genitalia, and then "sprang away" (476). They proceed to violently beat Cal, followed by their mutual urination on him; they attack him both physically and verbally: "Crawl back into the hole you came out of, freak" (477). As Butler notes, and as I have mentioned previously in this chapter, such violence proceeds from the fear of the unrecognizable, the uncategorizable, and the challenge that such anatomy might pose to the supposed coherence and legibility of the norms that govern the recognizably human. But this instance is not the only circle of violence that forms around Callie in *Middlesex*. Additionally, Callie faces a circle of doctor's faces that help us to understand how the medical circles that surround bodies also enact a violence that pertains to legibility.

After Cal's "defect" is discovered via her hospitalization, she is taken to Dr. Luce, who owns a Sexual Disorders and Gender Identity Clinic: "When babies with ambiguous genitalia were born at the hospital, Dr. Luce was called in to discuss the matter with the bewildered parents" (411). The subsequent medical scrutiny undergone by the protagonist reveals both the violence of the gaze that both believes in, and wishes for, legibility, as well as the language of suffering that permits the continuation of narratives of protection, that deem surgeries meant to "correct" genitalia considered to be ambiguous, as acts of saving. Cal describes the feeling of her body being medicalized and "read":

> I lay back. Without having to be told, I lifted my legs and fit my heels in the gynecological stirrups. The room had gone ominously silent. The three doctors came forward, staring down. Their heads formed a trinity above me. Luce pulled the curtain across the table.
>
> They bent over me, studying my parts, while Luce led a guided tour. I didn't know what most of the words meant but after the third or fourth time I could recite the list by heart. 'Muscular habitus . . . no gynecomastia . . . hypospadias . . . urogenital sinus . . . blind vaginal pouch . . .' These were my claim to fame. I didn't feel famous, however. In fact, behind the curtain, I no longer felt as if I were in the room. (420)

While the novel fluctuates in terms of its reliance on the legible or readable (as it does with its reliance on pure points of origin), it does not fail to evoke the violence of the medicalizing of the body, the ways in which the protagonist is repeatedly subjected to eyes that wish to shore the body up, make it legible. Cal's ambiguous genitalia is "missed" as an infant because her doctor fails to see it, as his vision is faltering with age. Problematically, this implies that had he only

been able to see clearly – had he only taken a closer look – her difference would have ultimately been made readable and visible to him. Yet the reduction of her body to an object of study, the cartographical paths of a guided tour, reveals Cal's ultimate suspicion of regimes of legibility that revoke her humanness through the making of her body into an infinitely chartable map. She disappears behind the curtain, no longer feeling as if she herself were present, her personhood dissipating as they prod and poke, analyzing the genitalia which – according to the social norms and the medical industry which contextualize the meaning of her body – defines, and ultimately makes readable, *who* or *what* she is, or can be.

Katrina Karkazis, writing about interviews she has conducted with patients, families, and doctors involved in intersex births, quotes Louise Rutherford, who has "Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia" (CAH): "I remember feeling like a freak show because every doctor had to do a genital examination. It didn't matter how much you cried or that you were cold. No one cared" (222). Karkazis notes that multiple interviews reveal similar feelings of objectification. Her interviewee Kristin Rupp states,

> My sister and I had every endocrinologist looking at us. Then the urologist would look at you. And then if you were in the hospital, the nurses would look at you. And then, when you go to the pediatrician, he'd look at you. It wasn't just once a year to see how everything's going; it was so many times a year. It could be thirty people over a year who would actually see you. They'd poke and prod and say, 'Well, the vaginal opening isn't big enough,' and of course, they'd insert their finger to prove that. It was painful, but you never could really say anything. They wouldn't look you in the face or the eyes. They'd come in and talk about you like you weren't even there, and you didn't have any say in the matter. (222)

Like the fictional Cal, patients have expressed the medicalizing, dehumanizing gaze exerted upon their bodies. As Rupp suggests, doctors refused to look her in the face or eyes, discussing the "vaginal opening," for instance, as if the person being examined were not there. One's voice, volition, and humanity did not matter. Significantly, Karkazis points out that such exams often elicited resentment towards parents regarding the lack of "protection" that occurred in these exams. Karkazis writes that, "Parents were often present but were either unwilling or unable to stop these exams. Their perceived passiveness in some cases eroded the child's trust of parents who did not speak up for or protect them" (222). Karkazis suggests that some parents have eventually been presented with notions of protection that challenge the decisions made about infants and children born intersexed. The notion of protection initially connected to surgery and follow-up medical procedures and exams makes a contradictory turn, challenging the claim to protection that justifies intervention. Instead, often, parents must come to terms with understanding "protection" in a much different way than they do initially; this is discussed further in an analysis of the film *XXY* in the following chapter.

Lines of Distinction

In "Intolerable Ambiguity," Elizabeth Grosz notes that despite the many different considerations that could be made in determining sex at birth, it is primarily the (one, single) visible "determinant" that is taken into consideration. She writes that, "medically oriented studies of hermaphroditism have indicated that the primacy given to the visible manifest differences between the sexes is biologically unwarranted [. . .] Sex is a much more complicated matter than the information afforded by vision; yet our lived (as opposed to scientific) understanding of sexual difference is focused on the presence (or absence) of visible genitalia" (60).[46] This primacy on the visible not only at birth, but also throughout the courses of life

thereafter, is a way of reiterating heteronormativity, as well as reaffirming vision and the visible world as tellers of truth; the fact that at the very moment of inception into the world, one is being "read" primarily through the visible clearly results in violences that perpetuate themselves through the *forcing of lines*. These are the kinds of lines that Ahmed discusses in *Queer Phenomenology*; she writes,

> So we walk on the path as it is before us, but it is only before us as an effect of being walked upon. A paradox of the footprint emerges. Lines are both created by being followed and are followed by being created. The lines that direct us, as lines of thought as well as lines of motion, are in this way performative: they depend on the repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken, but they are also created as an effect of this repetition. To say that lines are performative is to say that we find our way and we know which direction we face only as an effect of work, which is often hidden from view. (16)

These are the reiterative lines that perform and (re)produce identifiable and categorical males, females, and people, based on visual registers and distinctions. The rhetoric of purity of nation or race, of sexuality or gender, of biology or morphology, and the discourses of white heteronormativity (wishing to sustain its own power) intertwined within this rhetoric, relies on the ability to *visually distinguish* to determine, with the eye, "one" from "the other" and to *visually extinguish* traces of arrivals that might counteract those moments of supposed legibility. Legibility is *performed, reiteratively performed*. And the violences that occur in that performance must not be disacknowledged in the name of "saving" and "tragedy."

With the scrutinizing eyes of multiple doctors still hovering over her, Cal reveals the language of suffering that surrounds his body. In his efforts to keep his work funded, Dr. Luce,

Cal informs the reader, both reiterates and reproduces the language of tragedy that continues to foster narratives that refuse to see such a body as possibility, as a liveable life, as (to quote Butler) an "occasion for flourishing":

> As I lay there, letting Luce, in rubber gloves, do what he had to do, I got a sense of things. Luce wanted to impress the men with the importance of his work. He needed funding to keep the clinic running. The surgery he performed on transsexuals wasn't a selling point over at the March of Dimes. To get them interested you had to pull at the heartstrings. You had to put a face on suffering. Luce was trying to do that with me. I was perfect, so polite, so Midwestern. No unseemliness attached itself to me, no hint of cross-dresser bars or ads in the back of louche magazines. (421)

Again, in Dr. Luce's world, the refusal to imagine other-wise, the social imaginary that dictates that this body is suffering a "tragic" fate, deems Luce the savior. His work can be justified and funded within the dominant social imaginary and medical institutions because the "tragic" situation of this body calls for normativization. The coercion, and the violence of the medical scrutiny Cal undergoes, are eclipsed. Her body needs to be "corrected" or "fixed" because it is deemed pitiable, pathetic, and impossible in both economies of desire and regimes of visibility and recognizability.

But Cal's own decision regarding this process of "saving" suggests the violence of normativizing surgeries performed on infants under the guise of protection, in the name of preventing inevitable tragedy. "My father," says Cal in *Middlesex*, "couldn't understand what made me flee my surgery. He couldn't fathom why I wouldn't want to be fixed, cured" (464). Despite the multiple violences that Cal undergoes in a social world that makes no space for

middleness or betweenness, he eventually insists on the importance of both volition and desire in the context of surgery. The gathering of medicalizing eyes over the body of Cal replicate, and reiterate, the circle that might have gathered around Cal as an infant, had such a "discovery" been revealed at that time. Without Cal's say, the doctor and parents make a determination about what/who Cal should be, and what measures should be taken in order to accomplish that what and who. But Cal is not an infant, so Cal runs away. In his departure, and that volition and desire that prompt his leaving, the body that disappears in common constructions of saviors and tragedies in operations on "ambiguous genitalia" is expressed. Cal flees in order to *save himself*, because he can. Because Cal saves himself from the very medical decisions which are typically constructed as *saving* the tragic infant, his narrative counteracts those discourses of protection which wish to rhetorically legitimate coercive heteronormativization.[47] When Ahmed discusses the making of lines, their performativity and reiteration, she also proposes that,

> Deviation leaves its own marks on the ground, which can even help generate alternative lines, which cross the ground in unexpected ways. Such lines are indeed traces of desire; where people have taken different routes to get to this point or that point [. . .] Inhabiting a body that is not extended by the skin of the social means the world acquires a new shape and makes new impressions. (20)

When Cal continues life without surgery, and when he refuses the definitions of saving proscribed for him, he creates such lines of deviation, charting new kinds of paths, and opening up new homes and spaces for habitation in the lines that might follow him. When he makes a path to San Francisco, fleeing his potential surgery, he creates such lines. And as such, also creates new shapes, new impressions, for possible lines to be taken – those lines that flee surgery.

Regimes of Recognizability: Contesting the King's Court

While I would agree with Shostak's suggestion that *Middlesex* reiterates many of the binaries it wishes to resist, I would disagree with her stance regarding the social imaginary, and her approach to Butler's project in *Undoing Gender*. Shostak proposes that betweenness and hybridity might be thinkable, but are simply not liveable; they may be possible in the imagination; but the imagination, she implies, cannot necessarily *come to be*, having material and real effects on bodies. Butler's assertion that the work of fantasy and work within the realm of the imaginary are as "crucial as bread" – which refuses the ideology that the theoretically possible is incompatible with what might be possible in coming to be – has served as a fundamental tenet of this project, as well as has much of the work done in *Undoing Gender*. Butler's concepts about intelligibility, violence, and ethical approaches to "the Other" have permeated this project. Yet, there are subtle ways in which this project also works to depart from or, rather, to build on, Butler's frameworks of human recognition. Butler argues that, "our very sense of personhood is linked to the desire for recognition, and that desire places us outside ourselves, in a realm of social norms that we do not fully choose, but that provides the horizon and the resource for any sense of choice that we have" (33). The "I," she suggests, always speaks to and for another, and always speaks from within the norms governing the articulation of that "I." In the important acknowledgement of the violence and danger faced by those that remain illegible within those norms, Butler continues that

> To be part of a sexual minority means, most emphatically, that we are also dependent on the protection of public and private spaces, on legal sanctions that protect us from violence, on safeguards of various institutional kinds against unwanted aggression imposed upon us, and the violent actions they sometimes

instigate. In this sense, our very lives, and the persistence of our desire, depend on there being norms of recognition that produce and sustain our viability as human. (33)

Butler suggests that it is through recognition that we come to develop communities, and feel belonging. It is through the recognition of norms, the State, and the law, that desires and bodies can be recognized, conferred with the status of "human," and therefore attributed with rights. If I do not identify with the category of male or female, then another category, through which I can identify and be identified – be recognized – must, or should, Butler argues, exist for me. Butler's argument is, in some ways, for a proliferation of categories of identity. In this way, more difference can be accounted for, and recognized as human. One's body can only be given rights and conferred humanness, accordingly, when a body is made legible, when that body is recognized through the categories offered by the norms governing bodies, by the State and the law. Butler notes the importance of this for a person who desires a transsexual surgery. Often, Butler states, insurance will not cover the operation – or, in many cases, the medical/psychiatric industry will refuse the operation itself – should one not reiterate the narratives of integrity and "wrongness" of body that are requisite for such a desire, before it can be normativized and made permissible, precisely through its pathologization.

Butler acknowledges both the positive (gaining access to such technologies) and the negative (being forced to reiterate a particular fiction, whether or not one believes or feels this fiction is applicable to their own desires) elements of such requirements. Both surfaces and desires become ultimately legible in these conditions. Desires can be made readable to the State and the medical industry (and insurance companies) through the creation of pathologizing narratives that incorporate only those who are willing to speak of, and present themselves as,

legible through that pathology. The articulation of desire must remain within the confines and constructs of that system, abiding by dominant narratives of purity – that I want my body to be (and that my body can possibly be) whole, integrated, coherent, which reiterates mythologies of body and subject as once-pure, as once existing in prior spaces of non-contact. However, these regimes of recognizability, and making legible of bodies and desires, continue to marginalize bodies that do not or cannot make themselves legible within those regimes of recognizability. Butler suggests that individuals who seek transsexual surgeries *must* narrate themselves as such, even if one does not feel this particular desire for "wholeness," or that one was "born into the wrong body." She also notes that, while some individuals find these articulations applicable to their bodies and others do not, it is regardless the necessary narrative for attaining surgery. Such desires must be pathologized, and while Butler argues that this restricts individuals from articulating a less fixed view of gender, she also suggests that – for now – reiterating this narrative may be the only means of financially attaining such a surgery.

Susan Stryker and Nikki Sullivan argue about fictions of bodily integrity that continue to permeate the social imagination in the U.S. In their analysis, they approach the subjects of both transsexualism and what has become known as BIID (Body Integrity Identity Disorder), the medicalized term for people who articulate a desire to amputate one (or more) of their own limbs. Sullivan and Stryker note that many members of the self-demand amputation community have begun to look toward the transsexual community, and their growing recognition in the U.S., which serves as a model for the eventual recognition of the self-demand amputation community (this can also be evidenced in some of the online forums of, for, and about, self-demand amputees, or "wannabes" that have emerged). Sullivan and Stryker note that, "Self-demand amputees have essentially begun to argue that transsexuality has moved over time from 'clearly

bad' to the 'conflict zone,' while they themselves, having recently appeared on the horizon of cultural visibility as 'bad,' have a clear path toward potential legitimation laid out before them; or – dare we say it – toward social integration" (56). While these means of recognition might be necessary for the attainment of rights, or access to particular technologies, this model is also quite troubling in its dialogic movements. With each stamp of recognition, each movement toward legibility and legitimating regimes of visible and readable acknowledgment, there will always be bodies and desires that continue to be marginalized.

In the words of Sullivan and Stryker, "The queen's body secures its passage to transsexual womanhood, to live as she wants to live it, through a perilous exchange [. . .] The queen's body is one that strikes a deal with sovereignty to access the power of certain normativities as an avenue for its own peculiar life" (59). But in this perilous exchange, it is the presence of the "peculiar life," the body of the queered queen in the king's court that, even if speaking the tongues of power's fictions, in some way defies the body of the king. Yet, in recognition, there are always "others" who remained unrecognized. Even with the proliferation of categories, we still rely on those categories of recognition, which always already means that there will be "others" outside that regime of legibility, whose humanness and rights are then not conferred. Might we instead, or at least *also*, contest this notion of legibility? While the Queen's body might temporarily utilize the King's court as a means to her end, might she also struggle against the ideologies of legibility governing the court itself? Might we also struggle in opposition to the King's belief that it is desirable, or possible, to make her legible to him? Might she demand that the King recognize that both his body (the King's) and hers (the Queen's) are ultimately unrecognizable and illegible to each other? Is this not a less violent proposition, a less violent way of looking upon "the Other"? This is not to deny or reduce the profound danger or

violence faced by those who fall outside those regimes of recognition and legibility governing who, and who does not, receive the conferral of humanness in the King's court. But it is to argue that we might, even in using the King's court, contest the rules by which it operates, grounded in regimes of recognizability and visibility that will always continue to recognize and legitimate some, while refusing that recognition and legibility to others – a court that continues to insist on the possibility and desirability of shoring up "the Other," making him readable, and thus violating him, colonizing him.

Vulnerability and Protection

Judith Butler suggests that there is a "primary tie" that binds together individual bodies and "others" – that human bodies are fundamentally dependent upon those "others" for growth and flourishing, that "Part of understanding the oppression of lives is precisely to understand that there is no way to argue away this condition of a primary vulnerability, of being given over to the touch of the other, even if, or precisely when, there is no other there, and no support for our lives" (24). While all bodies, Butler argues, are primarily vulnerable, that vulnerability is shaped by patriarchal, white, and heteronormative value systems in which, "Certain lives will be highly protected, and the abrogation of their claims to sanctity will be sufficient to mobilize the forces of war. And other lives will not find such fast and furious support and will not even qualify as 'grievable'" (24). Which bodies and lives are protected – which are saved or kept safe, which are defendable and which are disposable – are products of fictions created to sustain order. Narratives of protection that discursively transform acts of bodily war into acts of love and protection continue to violate under the name of the violated, perpetrate under the name of the perpetrated. This fiction constructs the white, male, able-bodied and heterosexual body as under threat, and continues to justify the violences that proceed from the endangerment of such

encroaching “others” by deeming such others a threat to both its bodily constitution and coherence; it harkens back to an imagined originary moment of purity, in which such coherence, and legibility, were present in the national “body.” This fiction also seeks to stabilize the norms that govern both human anatomy and life. Because of the “power and danger,” that are held in margins, the threat to the readability and dominance of those norms themselves also continues to justify the violence that proceeds from the fear of jeopardized “safety.”

Safety and protection, of course, are not only fictional. The lives that are not protected, not made safe, through the perpetuation of such narratives, are by all means lives that should be, but are not, protected. *Geek Love* and *Middlesex* remind us of whose bodily constitution is truly under threat, and suggests that the dynamics of such a narrative must incorporate, and value, the body who is truly in need of protection. We must no longer permit the justification of saving, when that saving means coercion. While I do not seek, here, to extrapolate the multitude of ways in which narratives of protection work to efface coercion in the name of saving an imagined once-coherent (and now “under threat”) body, I do wish to suggest that such narratives are extremely pervasive and have very material effects on bodies and lives in the world. While this chapter only gestures at a few instances within which such fictions are in operation, I believe it is a pressing need that we continue to map and analyze their many constellational contours.

Both *Geek Love* and *Middlesex* present us with images of violence and reading that engage us in questions of embodiment. *Geek Love* is a reminder of the fears of “submersion” that promulgate violence against those that are considered uncategorizable. Dunn’s novel also works to challenge narratives of saviors and tragedy and, as I have argued, these narratives are precisely those that permeate discourses surrounding infants with both physical impairments and ambiguous genitalia. *Middlesex* resuscitates the body and humanity of the body that are effaced

in arguments about surgery on infants born intersexed. While Eugenides' novel reiterates some of the binaries it intends to resist, it reveals important violences of vision, and violences in the desire for legibility, that pervade our most common conceptions of otherness and justice toward the human body. The image that is lent by these texts are not only the circles of guns (Vern Bogner in *Geek Love*) and fists (Cal's night attackers) that await in a social world that operates in systematic binaries of recognition and exclusion, but also the circles of doctors (surrounding Cal in *Middlesex*) and parents (desiring her normativization) and supposed saviors of the tragic body (as Miss Lick in *Geek Love*) that act coercively under the name of protection. And the scrutinizing eyes that attempt to shore up and read Cal in *Middlesex* (and the responses that proceed upon her body in the frustrated attempts to chart it onto dominant "maps of legibility") remind us of the violences enacted in the name of, in the insistence upon, and in the belief in the possibility of, ultimate legibility. And while it may be necessary to tread in the King's court of legibility and recognition, I argue that we must urgently intervene in a society that continues to abide precisely by those laws of readability.

Chapter 4
Illegibility and Between-ness On Screen: Histories of Contact in *Nip/Tuck, Videodrome,* and *XXY*

Women, people with disabilities or appearance impairments, ethnic Others, gays and lesbians, and people of color are variously the objects of infanticide, selective abortion, eugenic programs, hate crimes, mercy killing, assisted suicide, lynching, bride burning, honor killings, forced conversion, coercive rehabilitation, domestic violence, genocide, normalizing surgical procedures, racial profiling, and neglect. All these discriminatory practices are legitimated by systems of representation, by collective cultural stories that shape the material world, underwrite exclusionary attitudes, inform human relations, and mold our senses of who we are.

– Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Identity," 9

Representations of the Between

In the preceding chapters, visibility has functioned as a point of centering and departure in order to discuss looking upon "the Other," and to discuss the (un)readability that is afforded by that vision and looking. This chapter focuses on visual texts that confront viewers with a seeing that might go unseen. In these visual texts, viewers look upon objects or scenes of the abject that are marginalized, repressed, hidden within the dominant frameworks (and the dominant imaginary) of how bodies are understood, represented, or seen. In the narratives and images presented in the visual work approached in this chapter, the abject and the messy are featured on screen. Visual representations of histories of contact between bodies on screen emerge and reveal violence, coercion, and exploitation; viewers are confronted with abject bodily openings and spilling; bodies whose erasures often justify violence are re-visioned, and thus those erasures and violences are resisted. Each of these texts opposes dominant discourses of purity and isolation, and exposes (violent and messy) contact between bodies. In presenting texts that expose elements of the abject and the illegible, I do not suggest that all forms of (and histories of) contact can, in fact, be made visible before us. Rather, what these visual texts

suggest is that the visual/visible is not a source, or teller, of truth. In this skepticism of readability, these texts oppose dominant notions of the body as legible surface. Viewers are asked to reconsider their approach to what is seen, what is invisible or effaced, what might be hidden from view, and asks us to acknowledge the impossible of a totality – a coherency – of the visible or of vision.

Each chapter of this project has focused on texts that, in different ways, employ narrative and/or narrative structure that refuses the tenets of realism. This chapter, likewise, focuses on television and film that, through the visual, questions the visual (or visible) itself. As E. Ann Kaplan asks for the incorporation of visual media that represent identities as "in-between," which will be discussed further at the close of this chapter, each of these visual selections provide viewers with evidence that identity is not closed off, or enclosed, but rather that it comprises inevitable contact with other bodies, materials, and "foreign" agents, that reveal body and being as states of betweenness. The episodes of the FX series *Nip/Tuck*, David Cronenberg's 1983 film *Videodrome*, and Lucía Puenzo's 2007 film *XXY* each, in their own manner, present viewers with in-betweenness that challenges the fictitiously pure lines that divide race, sex, embodiment and subjecthood – through the openings that cannot but leave bodies both themselves, and other than themselves (both in-between, and always already in-contact). Each of these visual selections resonates with a previous chapter of this project, but does the work of offering imagistic representations with which viewers may identify. For instance, Katrina Karkazis notes that most parents confronted with an infant born intersexed have never been exposed to any information about such "in-between" identities. This will be discussed further later in this chapter, but Karkazis' assertion speaks to the importance of more media coverage (as Karkazis also calls for) that treats the subject of intersex with critical concern – and in a manner that does

not oppose surgical intervention only on the grounds of a return to the pure.[48] Rather, *XXY*, like the other visual texts incorporated in this chapter, keeps all identity in a state of betweenness, allowing viewers not only exposure to a character whose body is in-between, but allowing viewers to both confront, and perhaps identify with, in-between identities.

***Nip/Tuck:* Unreadable Surfaces and Messy Genealogies**

As discussed in Chapter 1 of this project, the migration of black bodies from the South to the (mostly urban) spaces of the North in the first quarter of the century provoked an obsession with reading facial features – keeping intact, solidified, lines of racial distinguishability that were supposedly once entirely delineable, legible. George S. Schuyler's *Black No More*, discussed in the first chapter, presents messy genealogical lines, challenging the notion of pure origins and a prior point of non-contact and total separability. Chapter 1 also focuses on the burgeoning of the cosmetics and cosmetic surgical industries in the early decades of the twentieth century in the United States, which appears as an undercurrent of Schuyler's text. Exploring a time in which whitening products and procedures began to blossom, *Black No More* satirically examines the simultaneous fear and desire for homogenization that marked the author's time, and continues in our own time.

Examining similar contemporary concerns with facial features, distinguishability, and cosmetic surgery, the FX television series *Nip/Tuck* at times confronts issues of race, gender, sexuality, and heteronormativity within the domain of aesthetic surgery with a productive, critical approach. Victoria Pitts-Taylor argues that *Nip/Tuck* offers much messier narratives of cosmetic surgery than do many other shows, particularly the multitude of reality shows that have appeared over the course of the past decade. While Pitts-Taylor concentrates specifically on *Extreme Makeover*, among these reality programs are *The Swan* – the 2004 show that focused,

like *Extreme Makeover*, on an ultimate "reveal" – and the 2010 show *Bridalplasty*, which replicates the theme of *The Swan* with the addition of a competition for surgery between brides-to-be. As Pitts-Taylor argues, *Extreme Makeover* (and other reality programs like it), produce clean narratives that refuse the appearance of the abject – the openings, dangers, and vulnerabilities that are part of cosmetic surgery. This clean narrative, with a "Hollywood ending" (58), she argues, dominate these programs, with few exceptions. Initially, she notes, "*Extreme Makeover* was produced with the complicity and participation of one of the most prominent organizations of plastic surgeons, the American Society of Plastic Surgery [ASPS]. The reason is unsurprising: they thought it would be good for business" (59). While the ASPS eventually issued statements that conveyed the unrealistic expectations cultivated in potential patients by the show, the initial support given by the industry demonstrates a significant contrast to the first reactions of the ASPS to the premiere of *Nip/Tuck*. The very bloody and graphic depictions of cosmetic surgeries in *Nip/Tuck* contend with the very cleanly narratives of aesthetic procedures presented to viewers in shows such as *Extreme Makeover*; thus, the charged response by the industry toward the FX show is unsurprising. As Pitts-Taylor notes:

> The society also took umbrage at the show *Nip/Tuck*, not a reality show but a drama depicting a Florida plastic surgery center and its surgeons, who are good-looking, arrogant, and melodramatic and often behave badly. (On occasion, for example, they even have sex with their patients.) 'The society takes great offense at the spurious depiction of its medical specialty, which is dedicated to restoring and reshaping the human body. While the FX 'drama' of the south Florida plastic surgery center is sensational, bordering on the absurd, it certainly is not realistic.' Given the distinctions surgeons themselves are keen to make, it is important to

> point out that *Nip/Tuck, I Want a Famous Face*, and other shows are not homogenous in their depiction of plastic surgery. (64)

Many of the narratives conveyed in *Nip/Tuck* demonstrate porous borders, and this is evident not only in the opened bodies and blood that fill the screen in each episode, but in the openings and contact between patients/doctors and family/work. There are no entirely safe bounds that divide these lives, and they refuse to abide by proper borders. Both life and surgery are a messy and abject business, and always already in ongoing (vulnerable) contact with one another. In resonance with these themes, the episodes "Madison Berg" and "Joy Kringle" present, in addition, messy genealogies, that refuse the clean lines of racial purity that dominate the national imaginary.

In the episode titled "Madison Berg," viewers are met with a critical approach not only towards homogenizing practices but, like Schuyler's *Black No More*, a criticism of those opponents of "ethnic" cosmetic surgeries who deplore the industry's threat to the supposed wholeness or purity of whiteness and blackness. In the episode, Madison Berg is a Jewish high school student who comes to the office of McNamara/Troy (the two plastic surgeons around whom the show revolves) to receive a "Sweet 16 nose job." While the teenager initially seems reluctant, simply abiding by the demand of her mother – and her mother's belief that this makes her more marriageable – she eventually expresses excitement over the prospect. The turning point for Madison occurs when Drs. McNamara and Troy take out a photo book of past rhinoplasty patients. Upon looking over photos, Madison realizes in amazement that one of the most popular girls at her high school is in fact "a Jew." Preceding her exposure to the photograph, she implies, the ex-patient was *indistinguishable* from those identified visually not as Jewish, but as "gentile." It is thus this indistinguishability which she seeks – an

indistinguishability which makes her more marketable, valuable, exchangeable – more marriageable.

When we witness Madison again she is back at her high school, evidencing her post-operative nose, which is in bandages. We view her just a moment after we view Matt McNamara – son of plastic surgeon Sean McNamara – at his school locker, and he has just struck up a conversation with a newcomer to the school, Ariel Alderman – who, we later find, rejects the identificatory label of "Neo-Nazi," (though this is arguably Ariel's position) but embraces that of "purist." Ariel and Matt express an interest in each other based on their mutual feelings of distaste towards stereotypical high school life. After seeing each other, Ariel requests that Matt set up a meeting with the surgeons – not for surgery, but rather to conduct an interview to assist her in her research paper on the subject of homogenization in U.S. culture. Matt agrees, and the interview is arranged.

The interview, however, does not go as the doctors expect. Ariel's first request is that the surgeons dye her skin black. When the surgeons respond with shock, she challenges them, asking them why they would find it acceptable to make a black person whiter, but not a white person darker. When they respond that they don't dye skin at all, she then asks them to respond to a question "closer to home." Ariel then proceeds to ask Drs. McNamara and Troy about the "Sweet 16 packages" offered by the firm to young Jewish women. At first, Ariel seems to critique practices of homogenization, as well as the willingness of the industry to "whiten" but not to "darken." Yet her seeming desire to critique a homogenizing industry vanishes rapidly into an opposition to such homogenization for reasons similar to those invoked in opposition to Schulyer's invented corporation, Black-No-More (see Chapter 1). Ariel proceeds to critique the industry for its making "otherness" indistinguishable. She attacks the industry in her repulsion to

the fact that it makes non-whites, as she says, “more viable in a white world.”

Ariel’s fear is one of mixing, miscegenation, and above all indistinguishability. She believes not only in the purity of whiteness, but the purity of all race and racial categorizations. Ariel issues this attack due to the threat she conceives it poses to her own distinguishably white face. For Ariel, homogenization threatens her privileged and empowered whiteness – and this indistinguishability threatens to destabilize that very privilege and power. When her “they” becomes indistinguishable from her “we,” “us,” or “me,” lines threaten to overrun themselves, and thus the naturalness (as she conceives of it) of those lines are violated. Ariel articulates a belief in the possibility of pure, whole bodies as well as readable, definable surfaces and faces that are in danger of becoming impure and unreadable, with the infringement of supposedly once whole, separable others.

When Matt McNamara joins Ariel and her parents for dinner, the dynamics at work further our comprehension of how Ariel and her family perceive racial purity. As we are brought into the Alderman’s kitchen and dining room, we see Matt and Ariel’s mother peering over a collection of ceramic cookie jars, painted and shaped into large black women who are wearing aprons – “mammies.” When Matt asks Ariel’s mother if she believes the jars to be “a little racist,” she responds by stating that she does not find them offensive, but rather that these are remembrances of a time “back before they wanted to look like us.” Bill Brown, in his work on thing theory, focuses on the “Jolly Nigger Bank” – also discussed in Chapter 1 – as an historical object that possesses a very distinct history; Brown’s theorization of the significance of the coin-bank provides a more comprehensive understanding of the place of the cookie jars in the Alderman’s kitchen. Brown writes that,

> The fixity of the stereotype, rendered in ceramic or iron or aluminum, compensates for the new heterogeneity of black America; the nostalgic embodiment of some fantasmatic past compensates for uncertainties about the future place and role of African Americans in the U.S. [. . .] American racial typology proves to be a convenient way, throughout the West, of securing such allotemporal stability. (185)

Although Brown's work devotes attention specifically to the collecting of these items during the Reconstruction era in the U.S., Ariel's family very clearly collects these objects for similar reasons. Brown's analysis of these objects furthers a critical approach to the cookie jars in this episode of *Nip/Tuck*. Ariel's mother memorializes a time that she nostalgically longs for – a past in which "who's who" (see Chapter 1) was distinguishable, and a time in which whites enslaved blacks, clearly a time when white power (structures) were stabilized through the abuse, rape, torture, and murder of black bodies. Rather than a critique aimed at the institutionalized coercion inflicted on bodies that do not or cannot conform to whiteness, her critique is not only narcissistic, but racist and "purist." Her monolithic "they" simply want to be like (her notion of, once again monolithic) "us." The only opposition to homogenization expressed by the character is that it jeopardizes lines of distinguishability that lend her privileges and power based solely on the color of her (white) skin. Also referenced in Chapter 1, George Yancy describes "the trick of white ideology; it is to give the appearance of fixity, where the 'look of the white subject interpellates the black subject as inferior, which, in turn, bars the black subject from seeing him/herself without the internalization of the white gaze' (Weheliye 2005, 422). On this core, it is white bodies that are deemed agential. They configure 'passive' Black bodies according to their will" (216-217). Mrs. Alderman represents, and subscribes to, this white ideology. She

mourns an imaginary moment of stability and unification – when “white” meant *this* and “black” meant *that* (in her mind, the image of the “mammy”); singular in a conception of blackness, whiteness, and a desire for immobility and the “ceramic-ness”/concretization of supposedly pure racial lines forges her rejection of homogenizing practices. The Alderman family desires the stoppage of motion – the halting of movement – because in their worldviews, such fluctuations (which are always already inevitable and always already ongoing) threaten to overtake what they conceive to be pure bodies and distinguishable surfaces/faces.

The storyline of Ariel and Matt resumes in the episode “Joy Kringle,” set during the winter holiday season, and this episode continues to critically approach false narratives of purity, with an emphasis on the creation of mythologies. In this episode, Matt and Ariel approach the Nativity scene displayed on their high school grounds. Ariel, looking on at the Nativity scene, which is comprised of black Biblical figures, states with vehemence, “This is so wrong.” Matt responds simply: “Yeah I know, I didn’t think they could put religious stuff on school grounds.” Again, with vehemence, Ariel speaks back: “Matt, are you looking at their faces? They’re black. Jesus was not black.” Matt, not taking the situation very seriously, jokes: “Maybe they’re a little dark-skinned, maybe. It’s not like they have afros.” The screen pans to a sign that reads “SPONSORED BY THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN AFTER SCHOOL CLUB” as Ariel states “Figures they would be allowed to do this.” Matt suggests she see the principal, and Ariel notes that, “she’s a Jew. She doesn’t care about Christmas. She’s at home on the 25th eating Chinese food or something. I mean if she really cared about this, this wouldn’t have happened.” As Ariel speaks Matt caresses her, holds her around the waist from behind, kissing her neck gently and comforting her: “This whole thing is a fairytale,” he says (referencing the Nativity scene before them); “c’mon, I thought we were skipping last period.” He turns away in frustration as

she continues to angrily address the situation she sees:

> Ariel: The story of the birth of Jesus is sacred Matt. It's the foundation of all Christianity. Saying that Jesus is a mudbaby is like pissing on the Bible.
>
> Matt: You're not supposed to take it literally. The story's for kids. Jesus is Santa Claus for adults.
>
> Ariel: Do you know who Santa was before he became the marketing tool he is today? Saint Nicholas, the patron saint of charity. But by 1931 Coca-Cola got ahold of him and he suddenly became this big fatass in a red suit flying around with a sleigh and reindeer. Totally corrupting the holiday and mocking any religious meaning behind it.
>
> Matt: You're kidding.
>
> Ariel: No, I'm not. It's a perfect example of what happens when we don't protect our history. When we don't protect our truth. It can be rewritten. We have to do something.[49]

The whitening of bodies and histories, which will emerge with a physical literality later in the episode, is already present here. The history that must be protected is the history of whiteness and of (whitened) Christianity. The legacy and mythology that may only be a "fairytale," of course, has quite real effects. As Ariel points out, when mythologies are not protected, they can be re-written. Ariel does, then, acknowledge that history is in fact a matter of construction, and re-construction. But Ariel is already protecting a (whitened) rewriting of Jesus' facial features. She venerates a whitened mythology, a history of the Biblical text and of the image of Christ, appropriated and re-written as white in the West. As Ariel and Matt depart the scene of the Nativity, they plan to return at night, and eventually do so, stealing the figurines. Stuffing the

figures in the trunk of the car, they peel out, as one of the black figures tumbles out the back. Attached to the rope used to tie down the trunk, the black figurine falls to the road, held on by the rope around its neck. The reference to lynching is clear, and the performative elements of lynching (discussed in Chapter 1) are also evident. Christine Harold and Kevin Michael DeLuca (also cited in Chapter 1) suggest that, "Arguably, the regime of Jim Crow was the second act of the Civil War, a war over the meaning of black bodies continued by other means. Blacks were now 'free' which, for many whites, made them all the more necessary to control and subordinate. Lynching was the most violent instrument of control" (267). Similar to the cookie jars kept by Mrs. Alderman, Ariel's exercise of control (and her figurative lynching of the black body) over the figurines, functions as a mechanism of demanding stasis on the black body; it is her violent reassertion of the lines of division between black and white.

This image also resonates strongly with the murder of James Byrd, Jr. in Jasper, Texas in June of 1998. Byrd, a 49-year-old black man, fell victim to a brutal death in which three young white men brutally beat him, urinated on him, cut his throat and then chained him by the ankles, dragging his body from a pickup truck. Byrd was alive for at least most of the dragging, and his three white tormentors – Shawn Berry, Lawrence Brewer, and John King – deposited his mutilated body in a black cemetery, which was followed by the three going to a barbeque, replicating earlier lynching traditions. Brewer and King were both identified as white supremacists. Ashraf Rushdy describes King's tattoos, as well as the aftermath of Byrd's murder that in effect made the persistence of white supremacy quite visible:

> Prosecutors showed thirty-three slides and photographs of the images inscribed on King's body: a cross with a black man hanging from it, a swastika, the insignia of Hitler's SS, a woodpecker peeking out from a Ku Klux Klan hood [. . .] It was

> King's body, not Byrd's [as no image of Byrd's mutilated body was published], that became an advertisement for white supremacy, and judging by the John William King tribute pages that have sprung up on the internet, the advertisement has been successful. (74-75)

According *New York Times*' Steve Barnes in 2004, Byrd's grave was twice desecrated in the aftermath of his gruesome murder, and the vandalism perpetrated included the scratching of racial slurs into his gravestone. The acts of vandalism to the grave replicate – albeit less violently – the desire to stabilize white power through a physical destabilization of a black body that is clear in the case of Byrd's murder. The dragging of Byrd's body is, as mentioned, recalled in the moment of Ariel and Matt dragging a black figurine from the back of their car. Although Byrd was chained by the ankles – rather than his neck – to hang from the pickup, the image thus multiply hearkens not only to Byrd's murder, but to the murder of Emmett Till, and to the murder of countless black people in the United States' history of both slavery and lynching. As this image resonates, viewers are asked to recall not only the violent history of racism, hatred, and violence in the United States, but also the contemporary incidents that remind us that supremacist-motivated violence is all but obsolete or eradicated, as is also evidenced in the successful "advertisement" of John King's hate crime to a community of supremacists. Other "copycat" crimes even emerged shortly after the murder.[50] In a society that continues to believe – oftentimes very ardently, dangerously so – in notions of racial purity, the image that we see on the television screen in the fictional world of *Nip/Tuck* resonates very strongly not only with the 1998 murder of Byrd, but conveys a remembrance of a bloody history, a country whose white power structure is founded on the violent acts perpetrated onto black bodies through claims to racial purity and superiority.

When Ariel and Matt return to the Alderman home, following the lynching and dragging image, viewers are reminded not just of that violent history, but of the lies of purity – often for the sake of sustained white power and privilege – that have continually motivated such acts. Ariel and Matt proceed to take the black Nativity figurines to Ariel's bedroom in order to paint them white, again demonstrating Ariel's attempt to regain or reassert a mythologized pure white history. As the two paint, Ariel worriedly inquires of Matt, in reference to the Virgin Mary figurine: "Can you tell that she's still black?" After Matt's reply that she looks "albino," Ariel disagrees, and states, "I think we're gonna have to do second coats on all these. They're not white enough…You can tell that she's black. Look, when the light hits her you can definitely tell […] I don't want people to know that there was black under there before. Why is that wrong?" As Ariel looks upset, Matt asks if something is wrong; she agrees to share a secret with him on the grounds that he keep it. He agrees, and Ariel proceeds to inform Matt of a project she did for her history class, in which she had to research her family tree, "and then I found out that my mom's great-grandmother was black which means that my mom is part black which means that…you didn't know that my mom was an octoroon when you first met her did you?" Confusedly, Matt asks: "A what?" Ariel explains that this indicates her mother is "one eighth black," which makes her "one sixteenth." Matt assures her that no one would ever be able to tell. Ariel responds:

> My dad might. If I get any darker, then my dad's gonna be able to tell […]one day I could start to turn, I read it online Matt . . .Can you help me whiten my skin? […] If my dad finds out I have black blood in me, he's gonna go ballistic. I mean you've seen how he is. I'm really scared about what he's gonna do to me and my mom.

Ariel's position here is threatened, not only because past threatens to become present (both in the sense of time/place and visibility), or because white threatens to become black, but because her own body, as a placeholder of signification is shifting. Ariel fears contamination, the breaking down of visible barriers between bodies; and when she realizes her own body has been subject to this contamination (not just contaminated blood, but contaminated *meaning, history, "truth"*) her only recourse is to "whiten." Ariel's reaction to uncovering the black blood that permeates the history of her own body is a recourse to bleaching. Following the whitening of the Nativity figurines, Ariel coerces Matt into taking bleach cream from his mother's post-surgery spa, and she applies it overenthusiastically to her face. Momentarily, she is screaming in pain, as the bleach burns her face; Matt takes her to McNamara/Troy to receive treatment, and viewers again witness a whitening of history. Mr. Alderman, Ariel's father, enters the room in a huff, demanding to know what happened to his daughter. But when Matt conveys the narrative of Ariel's discovery of roots, and her subsequent skin bleaching, she vehemently denies Matt's "version" of the story. Both Ariel and her father call Matt a liar, and they depart in outrage from the scene.

Ariel's rejection of Matt's version of the story, along with her father's absolute denial of this possibility, demonstrate the lies and created mythologies of purity and pure origin that persist in the name of sustaining a white power that is threatened by the overtake of otherness. Ariel attempts to whiten the surface of her face, which is endangered by what Ariel sees as the gradual eating away at, or submersion of, her white surface and facial features. She fears that blackness will slowly engulf the light complexion that makes up her distinguishably white face. Ironically, Ariel resorts to the very "erasure" she firstly rejects; she objects to "Sweet 16" surgeries because they, to her, erase distinguishably ethnic features. In bleaching her skin, Ariel

attempts to rid herself of the possible coming-to-visibility of signs which might distinguish her as "other." [51] When Ariel suggests a fear about the re-writing of the Nativity scene, she desires a very particular version of history – which is not unlike the history of her own body that she wishes to preserve in framing Matt's version of her history as a lie. Purity is a lie which, for the Alderman family, must be protected.

The storyline we encounter in these episodes bears a resonance with Schulyer's novel, which exposes (as discussed in Chapter 1) purity as mythology, precisely through the "impurity" of its most racist and purist characters. Like the leaders of white supremacist groups in *Black No More*, the purity of the purist in this episode of *Nip/Tuck* proves mixed. Genealogy, as the episode suggests, is an always already mixed thing, though its mixtures may be concealed beneath a "smooth" surface. Faces (and surfaces) prove (as in *Black No More*) to be illegible. Schuyler's epigraph/dedication blatantly conveys this; although also cited in Chapter 1, the epigraph to Schuyler's *Black No More* warrants repeating: "This book is dedicated to all Caucasians in the great republic who can trace their ancestry back ten generations and confidently assert that there are no Black leaves, twigs, limbs or branches on their family trees." And what the revelation of such leaves, twigs, limbs and branches threaten, in both *Black No More* and *Nip/Tuck*'s Alderman family, is the white power structures that make their claims to power based on the "natural" superiority of whiteness. On screen, we witness a tale much like the story we encounter in Schuyler's much earlier text. The episode challenges viewers to rethink the continued construction of race and racial difference as a visual "truth" – as one is forced to encounter signs of difference and histories of contact and mixing as contingent and not necessarily appearing on the surface. Viewers must confront, through the screen itself, the (un)readability of the visible, and the violent whitening of both bodies and histories that seek to

deny histories of contact. We *see* (on the screen) that messy genealogies, and that (often violent) histories of contact are not always legible on the surface. We are also confronted with an identity in-between; a body that is not of pure origins, but shaped by histories of contact between bodies that leaves no body not-between.

Videodrome: "Long Live the New Flesh"[52]

While it may seem quite incongruent to move from a discussion of a popular television series to a work from the Canadian filmmaker and screenwriter David Cronenberg, I maintain that both the episode and film under discussion are texts that are and should be significant in thinking, and re-conceptualizing, embodiment. The story conveyed in the episode of *Nip/Tuck* discussed above presents (racial) identity as abject, messy, and in-between; fruitfully, Cronenberg's work also conveys identity as in-between, mutating and in-contact, plagued indelibly by the presence of the abject. The narrative of Ariel Alderman challenges the purity of race and whiteness, positing a bodily surface and a family tree that conceals mixing within it. Likewise challenging the typical conceptions of vision that would have us believe in the (bodily) surface as that which reveals truth, Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (and his later film *eXistenZ*) refuse to attribute coherency or legibility to either the body or to the visual/visible.

David Cronenberg's 1983 film *Videodrome* asks viewers to consider the effects of the screen (television/film), of media, on the human body; it reflects on the relationship between the body, technology, sex, violence, pornography, fantasy, hallucination, reality, and consumption. Cronenberg, heavily influenced by the work of William S. Burroughs[53], brings Burroughsian themes, imagery, and concerns into *Videodrome*. Like *Naked Lunch* (the focus of Chapter 2 in this project), *Videodrome* proliferates with bodily openings, and presents a world that itself takes on flesh.[54] Similar to *Naked Lunch*, the film also offers us both abject imagery and an abject (in

this case visual) text. Working in opposition to narratives of purity or isolation, which suggest that there is a prior point of non-contact between the body and the world, between the "I" and the "not-I," *Videodrome* presents viewers with bodies that are always already in interaction and contact with what is inside and outside of the body.

Videodrome is set in Toronto, and follows protagonist Max Renn (James Woods), who owns a small cable television station featuring pornographic (or softcore pornographic) material. After Max encounters a broadcast of "Videodrome," which features scenes of torture and violence, he eventually discovers that the broadcast is in fact snuff – that the victims portrayed in the broadcast were actually being tortured and killed. Max obsessively pursues the origin of the "Videodrome" broadcast, which initially is thought to be emanating from Malaysia, but is in fact coming from Pittsburgh (though he eventually realizes it is not a "broadcast" at all). Appearing on a talk show, Max defends the programs his station carries to both Nicki Brand (Deborah Harry), a psychiatrist with whom Max gets sexually – and sadomasochistically – involved, and Brian O'Blivion (Jack Creley), whose character is loosely based on media theorist Marshall McLuhan.[55] O'Blivion refuses to appear directly on television, and insists on being broadcast only from other, remote, locations. As Max later discovers, Professor O'Blivion has already passed away, and continuing broadcasts are merely old tapings of him. Max's search for the origin of "Videodrome" eventually leads him back to O'Blivion. After Max learns that O'Blivion has knowledge of the "Videodrome" broadcast, he ventures out to pay him a visit at The Cathode Ray Mission, a space in which the homeless of the area are provided food and shelter, and also partake in compulsive television watching. The Cathode Ray Mission, now run by O'Blivion's daughter Bianca (Sonja Smits), aims to carry out the prophecy of her father: that television will eventually be substituted for the real. During the first meeting between Bianca

and Max Renn, Bianca does not divulge the truth of her father's death; after Max's departure, however, she sends him a videocassette recording of her father, in which Brian O'Blivion reveals information about "Videodrome." Upon another visit the Cathode Ray Mission, Bianca reveals not only her father's death – but also its cause – to Max Renn. Although O'Blivion initially played a role in creating "Videodrome," he belatedly realized that the broadcast was being used in ways he did not forsee – as part of a government conspiracy to rid the country of people the likes of Max – people sick and perverse enough to watch "Videodrome." As Max finds out, "Videodrome" contains a deleterious signal, that prompts the development of a lethal brain tumor in whoever views the broadcast – whoever is sick enough, that is, to watch it.

Following Max's viewing of "Videodrome," his world begins to take on flesh. Whether the fleshliness that emerges in Max's world is hallucination or reality is unclear; and whether it is the result of his tumor, his perverse obsessions, or his overexposure to television (specifically, pornographic imagery) is ambiguous. Regardless, the fleshliness that emerges in Max Renn's world becomes an undeniable element of *his* reality. Max's pornographic consumption practices present more than mere questions of media influence on material/real actions; it also presents viewers with bodies that cannot be extricated from consumer practices. Like Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, Cronenberg's film refuses the dominant understanding of consumer practices that assumes bodies can be isolated from acts of purchase, exchange, commodification, and commerce. After Max's encounter with the snuff film, objects in his world begin to take on flesh – or, more appropriately, they *become* flesh(ly).

After Max's preliminary visit to the Cathode Ray Mission, following his first inquiry to Bianca regarding "Videodrome," a videocassette arrives for Max from the office of O'Blivion. Just as he removes it from the case, the cassette becomes flesh, as it bulges from the center of his

hand, and he drops it to the floor. Max looks confusedly at the tape, now lifeless, on the floor. Skeptical and bewildered, he looks it over, and then decides to play the tape. Brian O'Blivion appears on the screen, and begins to speak about "Videodrome," explaining how he became its first victim:

> The battle for the mind of North America will be fought in the video arena – the 'Videodrome.' The television screen is the retina of the mind's eye. Therefore, the television screen is part of the physical structure of the brain. Therefore, whatever appears on the television screen emerges as raw experience for those who watch it. Therefore, television is reality. And reality is less than television. Max, I'm so glad you came to me. I've been through it all myself you see. Your reality is already half video hallucination. If you're not careful, it will become total hallucination. You'll have to learn to live in a very strange new world. I had a brain tumor, and I had visions. I believe the visions caused the tumor, and not the reverse. I could feel the visions coalesce, and become flesh. Uncontrollable flesh. But when they removed the tumor, it was called 'Videodrome.'

At this point, Nicki Brand appears on the screen. She tells Max to come to her, not to make her wait. "Come to me," she repeats. Max, intrigued by the appearance of Nicki on O'Blivion's video, moves closer to the television, his hand resting on the top of it. Nicki, on screen, begins breathing heavily and as she beckons and breathes, the top of the television begins to rise and bulge under Max's hand. Max begins to caress the top of the television as it moves, as if it is itself skin, flesh. "I want you, Max," Nicki continues to urge, "Come on…come to me now…come to Nicki." The television screen now begins to bulge from the box, Nicki's teeth

and lips magnified and ballooning out at him. Max buries his head in it, kissing what Tim Lucas refers to as the "Flesh TV."[56]

After visiting Bianca again, Max receives a second videotape. As he sits on his couch, paranoid, with a gun in hand, he plays the video recording of Brian O'Blivion:

> I believe that the growth in my head […] I think that it is not really a tumor. Not an uncontrolled, undirected little bubbling part of flesh, but that it is in fact…a new organ, a new part of the brain. I think that massive doses of the Videodrome signal will eventually create a new outgrowth of the human brain, which will produce and control hallucination to the point that it will change human reality. After all there is nothing real outside our perception of reality, is there? You can see that, can't you?

As Max watches the video, he runs his fingers over a rash that has developed on his abdomen. Renn begins breathing heavily, and the mark on his stomach begins to open. Resembling a vaginal opening, the hole itself begins breathing. Max sticks his gun in the abdominal hole, and his hand becomes lodged somewhere amidst his internal organs. As he wrenches his hand out, his flesh closes over the gun, which remains inside Max's body. He searches his apartment for the gun, perhaps looking for confirmation that the gun's disappearance into his stomach was a hallucination, that the gun is not inside his body; but Max finds nothing.

Max is eventually met by a man named Barry Convex (Les Carlson), who runs a company called Spectacular Optical. Barry is part of the conspiracy to rid the world (or at least North America) of "lowlifes" like Max, who consume pornographic material such as "Videodrome." Harlan (Peter Dvorsky), a man who has spent two years working at the television station with Max, is also (Max eventually discovers) in league with Convex, a co-

conspirator. Max learns that "Videodrome" was, in fact, not a live broadcast, but a pre-recorded video; it had not yet reached, then, the public eye. Yet Barry and Harlan are on the brink of doing just that, and the overtake of Max's television station has been planned for precisely those purposes. Thus, any "lowlifes" willing to watch "Videodrome" would fall prey to the same tumor, and demise, as Max (and Brian O'Blivion before him). Convex thus gives Max another video, but this video is inserted into Max's abdominal hole that once again opens; this video is meant to program Max to destroy his two business partners at the TV station, and to kill Bianca O'Blivion. Max, unknowingly programmed (with the real or hallucinated video now inserted into his stomach) to execute these orders, fulfills the first of these tasks. Max reaches into his stomach once again in order to retrieve the gun previously inserted into his body. As he pulls it out, the gun and his hand merge into what Lucas, like the "Flesh TV," refers to as the "Flesh Gun." Describing the scene, Lucas writes:

> The mutation of Max Renn's hand into the Flesh Gun was depicted in Cronenberg's script with an unflinching focus that had to be portrayed on screen: 'Eyes wide, pupils dilated, Max slowly pulls his hand out of the slit in his stomach. To his amazement, his hand is now in the process of transforming itself into a gun . . . As Max watches, metallic tendrils curl up from the gun and burrow into the flesh of his wrist and palm.' The transformation is an inversion of the machine-becomes-man principle of the Flesh TV: here man becomes machine (82).

Thus, Max goes to execute the first of his killing orders, and shoots his two business partners at the television station. He then returns, yet again, to the Cathode Ray Mission, in order to carry out the assignment of destroying Bianca O'Blivion. But the visit to Bianca does not go as

planned. She informs Max that he has been programmed, and also that Nicki has already met her death at the hands of the "Videodrome" conspirators. "'Videodrome' is death," says Bianca. As she says this, a gun protrudes from the snowy television screen in Max's view. Like Nicki's lips in the earlier "Flesh TV" scene, the screen bulges out with the gun. Though it emerges from the television snow, it becomes flesh-colored and hardens, and then the gun is fired at Max. His chest, shot, then appears on the screen in the room. Bianca tells Max, "You've become the video word made flesh." He repeats this: "I've become the video word made flesh." After Bianca informs Max of his programming, he removes the video from his stomach. Finding Harlan, Max shows him the videocassette, covered in what seem to be intestinal remains. When Harlan attempts to reinsert the video (and thus, reprogram Max to complete his mission in alliance with the "Videodrome" conspirators), he instead finds a grenade in Max's stomach; pulling it out, he meets his death. No longer programmed, Max then sets out to destroy Convex. Finding him at a Spectacular Optical convention, he shoots him with the "Flesh Gun," and Convex convulses on the floor. As blood is squirting out from his eyes, his insides pop and bulge out of his chest. The film comes to a close as Max locates and enters a condemned boat. Alone there, he sees (or hallucinates) Nicki on a television, coaxing him to shoot himself, to move into his "new flesh," by killing the old. Nicki tells Max she will "show him" how to do this, and an image of Max shooting himself in the head with the "Flesh Gun," standing behind a fire in the boat, comes on the screen. As the on-screen Max shoots himself, internal organs explode out of the television screen. Max then replicates this image himself, shooting himself in the head, standing behind a fire.

The machine-to-human and human-to-machine transformations in *Videodrome* render Max Renn's body not just technologically affected, but posthuman. Judith Halberstam and Ira

Livingston tell readers that, "You're not human until you're posthuman. You were never human" (8), and this is so because, as they suggest, the body is always "changing in kind"; tattoos, piercings, gender, sexual practices, all work to reconstitute the body itself, ongoingly: "I am becoming variously cyborgized (re-integrated with machine parts or across various networks). It is changing its dimensions, not by getting smaller or larger, but by being rhythmed across different sets of relations" (18). In Cronenberg's film, Max demonstrates these many cyborgizations; through the interaction and incessant contact between self and not-self, the body continually changes its dimensions. Max's body quite literally changes shape because of his contact with a snuff film, and also physically alters its dimensions through his hallucinatory visions. Like the "straight John at last" who becomes a crab in Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* (see Chapter 2), nothing remains straight in *Videodrome*. Self-alterity is inevitable, because the flesh of the human body is in constant contact with the flesh that is the world. Thus, the bodies we encounter in both Burroughs and Cronenberg are posthuman, and they are always already post. They are never wholly isolatable, never transcendent above the material world, and are always subject to opening and spilling in the spaces between, which are all but empty. In the film, we see Max's body become cyborgized through his contact with "various networks" – especially the networks of broadcasting, television, film, pornography, and consumption.

Both the "Flesh TV" and the "Flesh Gun" in *Videodrome* demonstrate this posthuman-ness. As has been mentioned, the character of Brian O'Blivion in Cronenberg's film is loosely based on Marshall McLuhan. McLuhan's theories about media effects on the human body are also relevant to the thematic of the film itself. Steven Shaviro describes McLuhan's contribution to posthuman studies: "Every mutation in culture is a new state of the body. Technological changes, as McLuhan said, are alterations in the very nature of our senses and of our nervous

systems. The inventions that make, say, genetic engineering practicable are themselves biological innovations" (39). O'Blivion argues that it is not a tumor, but a new organ, that has grown in the brain as a result of exposure to television (specifically, exposure to "Videodrome"). Isolation between nature and culture, between the inside and outside of both body and self, are never possible within Cronenberg's piece. Rather, they are in constant intershaping with one another, and there is no space accessible in which the body can be made invulnerable to the contact it makes with the world outside of itself; thus, the body is always reconstituting, revising what composes it. While Shaviro claims that, "Nobody understands these issues better than William Burroughs" (39), perhaps we might also look to Cronenberg in order to consider the contact between technology and the human body. Cronenberg's fleshly objects confront viewers with an inquiry about the contact between the flesh of the body and the flesh that (very literally, in the film) is the world.[57] Contact between the inside and outside – between the self and the foreign – do not have distinct lines of division in *Videodrome*. Openings in the body exemplify this exchange and interaction, which are always already occurring. When Brian O'Blivion claims that his exposure to "Videodrome" has provoked the growth of, "a new organ," a "new part of the brain," those alterations of the body in concert with its contact with the technological becomes evident.

Additionally, Cronenberg confronts viewers with a fleshliness that denies the possibility of claiming isolation in consumer practices. While most acts of purchase are seen as solitary acts (as discussed further in Chapter 2), that do not involve exploitation, violence, and coercion of others, the text of *Videodrome* prevents that erasure of bodies in consumer practices. When the objects in Max's vision begin "to coalesce, and become flesh" (in the words of Brian O'Blivion), the material he consumes cannot be extricated, to any degree, from his own flesh. The

stretchiness and vulnerability of the flesh – that *is* the flesh – is pictured on screen (on the screen, that is, within the screen), as the television bulges, much like the wall in Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, that "bulges to accommodate people," where "there is a soft *plop* and someone squeezes through the wall right into the next house" (149).[58] This ballooning signifies not only the fleshliness of the "outside" with which our bodies are always already in contact, but also suggests that what we view – what we consume – has fleshly, material consequences on both our own bodies as well as on the bodies of others. Commercial, violent, exploitative, and technological forms of contact encompassed on the screen in *Videodrome* deny any prior identification of singularity, isolation, or purity. Bodies are opened and opening, flesh is in contact with other flesh, and there is no moment of non-contact (and therefore, prior legibility) identifiable or locatable.

The abject that appears on the screen of *Videodrome* is also paralleled by the abject characteristics of the visual text, of the film itself. As the television screen bulges out at Max, viewers are confronted with the flimsiness and stretchiness of the flesh. As Deborah Caslav Covino writes (in discussion of Kristeva) the skin of milk disgusts us, "because human skin provides only a relatively flimsy and easily assaulted partition between the body's inside and the world outside, this milky reminder disturbs our distinction between outside and inside, I and other . . ." (17).[59] Thus this vulnerable border/barrier is exposed not by the skin of milk, as in Covino's example. Rather, it is demonstrated with the very stretchiness of flesh itself, ballooning out over itself. Yet this is only one of the multiplicitous scenes of the abject that are visually depicted in *Videodrome*. The openings of the body, and the spilling of the inside into the outside (and vice versa) continuously appear throughout the film.

The blood that spurts from the eyes of Convex as he dies, and the internal organs that explode out of his stomach, are paralleled by Max's internal organs exploding from the television screen in the final scenes of the film. In both of these instances, the body's insides combust into the outside. There is no dividing line that protects one from entering the other world – that is, the external breaching the internal, and the internal breaching the external. The skin, the border that supposedly guards against such mutations and migrations, of course, is revealed as extraordinarily tenuous. The internal becomes external in these combusting organs, but the external also becomes internal through the opening in Max Renn's abdomen. The incessantly ongoing contact between the media and Max's body is reiterated in the contact between the inside and outside of his abdomen. His body is unruly and disorderly, refusing to delineate a clean line between one and the other – between what does, and does not, constitute his "self." The "I" and the "other" leak and move in and out of one another. Viewers are also forced to consider the screen on which they themselves watch *Videodrome*, and the contact between the screen and one's own body.

Not only are viewers of *Videodrome* confronted by abject materials *within* the film, they are also confronted with the abject material that constitutes the narrative of the film itself. The film refuses to divide between clear insides and outsides, and resists an orderly body of narrative. Like Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, it challenges readers/viewers with a text that is unreadable, and does not seek is not a clean, properly-bordered text. As viewers, there is no guarantee that what we see is (or is not) a hallucination of Max Renn; there is no way to isolate the "half video hallucination" from the real. Viewers are left wondering how much of the narrative itself takes place only in the imagination of Max – how much is hallucinatory, as opposed to what actually occurs. Max is unsure, and so are we. We are given no reliable narrator (also like *Naked Lunch*)

to guide us through a legible story, with fully coherent dimensions. We are left without a point of origin or isolation. The inside has become out, and out in.

Many of the themes emphasized in Cronenberg's 1983 film are refocused in his later 1999 film *eXistenZ.* Integrating more contemporary emerging technologies, the narrative of *eXistenZ* recycles many of the concerns present in *Videodrome* in the form of the virtual reality game – which also, significantly, drew on the (exponentially) burgeoning commercialization of the Internet in the late 90's. In Cronenberg's 1999 piece, players all "port" into a game; the resonance between this and MMORPG's (massively multiplayer online role-playing games) is uncanny. While the players in *eXistenZ* all port into the game in the same room, and MMORPG's online do not require physical proximity, Lia M. Hotchkiss notes that, "the film's tongue-in-cheek sexualization of gaming emphasizes the communal aspect of gaming: any game that encompasses more than one player (e.g., Diablo II and various online games) offers a convivial alternative to the negative stereotype of the isolated, socially dysfunctional computer game enthusiast" (26). Thus, while there are no computers present in *eXistenZ*, the various networks and interfaces encountered in the film inevitably deal with the growing presence of the Internet in human communication, interaction, and life. The alternative identities taken on by each of the participants in the gaming experience are not only video game characters, but virtual avatars; this goes for all the game participants, although as viewers we become particularly familiar with protagonists Allegra (Jennifer Jason Leigh) and Ted (Jude Law). In essence, the *game* "eXistenZ" *is* an MMORPG; although the term (and the form of gaming) had yet to experience a good deal of growth, the term was actually coined by Richard Garriott in 1997,[60] previous to the release of Cronenberg's film.

Like *Videodrome*, *eXistenZ* demonstrates many of the ways in which we are networked in multiple layerings of relations and representations, as well as the ways in which we are cyborgized. As Hotchkiss' note above conveys, presented in the gaming of Cronenberg's later film are sexualized interactions between participants – specifically between Allegra and Ted. The "bioport" is an opening made on the lower back of the body, and entryway into the virtual world is gained by plugging part of the "pod" (comprised of fertilized amphibian eggs and synthetic DNA) into the hole in the back. At different points in the film, Allegra fingers, licks, and plugs phallic and fleshly material into Ted's bioport hole. One of the elements of the film that resonates most strongly with depictions of the posthuman body pertains to how the bioport and pod themselves function. When Ted naively inquires about the pod's batteries, Allegra laughs and explains that "it ports into you . . . your body, your nervous system . . . you get tired, run down . . . it won't run properly."[61] The pod itself, which is used to port into the game, is also, as is explained to Ted, an animal and fleshly. Not only is the pod alive, teeming with amphibian eggs and DNA, but the system runs off the human nervous system; human and machine are no longer simply human and machine, and neither are they hierarchized. The human and machine are mutually interimplicating. Also resembling *Videodrome*, *eXistenZ* likewise incorporates a version of the flesh gun. While different in composition, the flesh gun in *eXistenZ* is literally made of flesh and bone, and shoots human teeth into the victim. Again challenging the boundaries between human and machine, the machine is literally comprised of flesh and bone in Cronenberg's piece. In addition, the roles of each game participant parallel the characters we encounter in *Naked Lunch* and *Videodrome*, in that viewers can never be sure who is on which side, and whose allegiances are where – who is out to destroy the creator(s) of eXistenZ and/or tranCendenZ, in opposition to "the most effective deforming of reality" they

portray. Different corporate interests are evoked, defended, or sought out continuously throughout the game and/or the real, and are tied to the ongoing "plot."

Hotchkiss argues that the critical position articulated within the film, "is in keeping not only with Haraway's suspicion of transcendence but also with her celebration of the permeable boundary between humans and machines, namely, our cyborg status, which she calls 'a condensed image of both imagination and material reality'" (26). Like *Videodrome*, *eXistenZ* reflects on the intersections of imaginative and material worlds. In this vein, the later film also deals with the main themes of representation and reality (and the ambiguity between them) that is handled in *Videodrome*. In Cronenberg's earlier film, Max's compulsive (pornographic) consumption practices result in his inability to distinguish, or draw a line, between what is real and what is hallucinated. Similarly, a challenge to the visual information we encounter in both real and virtual, in real and representation, the participants in the gaming universe of *eXistenZ* cannot distinguish when they are, or are not, in the game – even though, as we come to find out, the violence within and/or outside of the game is driven by a concern over the preservation, or death, of realism (and this is tied to corporate interests). At the close of the film, Allegra and Ted emerge from the game and it is revealed that, while Allegra has been presented as the creator of the game "eXistenZ" since the beginning of the narrative conveyed to viewers, the roles introduced and adopted throughout have merely been the role-playing of the two in the game "transCendenZ." The game creator of "transCendenZ," in turn, becomes concerned that what transpired in the collective gaming episode revealed the desires of one of the participants – the desire to destroy him, in defense of realism (since the virtual, according to realists, poses a threat to the real). When Allegra and Ted reveal that they are the participants harboring this wish, they shoot the creator of tranCendenZ. Moving toward another participant to shoot him, the

participant finally challenges even this moment as real, asking the pair: "Are we still in the game?" The film closes here.

In many ways, *Videodrome* and *eXistenZ* epitomize the theme of this project, and also reflect the means by which the texts addressed throughout the preceding chapters come together. Both films pose a challenge to viewers in that they refuse a clear delineation between the real and the imaginary; in the film, Cronenberg does not permit the safe closure of resolution or teleological self-coherency. He does not merely deny viewers a determinable line between real and imagined/imaginary; he also challenges the assumption that there is a clean border between them. In other words, there is no real/unreal events or experiences, only amalgamations experienced in palimpsestic realms of the imaginative and the physical worlds, the biological and the creative worlds, the hallucinatory or dream worlds and the television worlds, the linguistic and inarticulable worlds, the cognitive and poetic worlds. The hallucinations of Max speak to these many intercrossing worlds, and the effect that the encountering of those intersections has on the body.

When Sara Ahmed suggests that there is always already "mixing in the family tree," she relates the search for pure and readable origin to the concealment of the histories of contact that are "lost sight of" in the tracing of genealogical lines. *Videodrome*, while it reflects directly neither on race nor on genealogy, does reflect on the impossibility of not-mixing of the various networks in which bodies and selves are enmeshed. In defining the posthuman body, Halberstam and Livingston write that the body,

> is not driven, in the last instance, by a teleological desire for domination, death or stasis; or to become coherent and unitary; or even to explode into more disjointed multiplicities. Driven instead by the double impossibility and prerequisite to

become other and to become itself, the posthuman body *intrigues* rather than desires; it is intrigued and intriguing just as it is queer: not as an identity but because it *queers*. (14)

Naked Lunch (discussed in Chapter 2), *Videodrome*, and *eXistenZ* present narratives that resist a teleological movement toward coherency, unity, singularity, resolution. But they also resist a desire for the explosion into "more disjointed multiplicities." These texts, rather, demonstrate an impossible but inevitable being, or becoming, of both self and other-than-self. *Naked Lunch*, *Videodrome*, and *eXistenZ* proliferate with mutating and transforming humans, creatures, and machines. The animal, the insect, the human, and the technological, are not wholly separate; they are both themselves, and other than themselves. Although Max Renn (in Cronenberg's earlier film) eventually kills himself, this does not resolve the othering self that viewers see. His moment of death represents not stasis, but continual self-othering. He shoots himself after seeing himself shoot himself on a television screen. Even in death, for Max, there is no stasis. After all, Max's hallucinatory vision does not preclude the possibility that there is, in fact, no suicide. The death is as real as it is unreal, something other than itself while still, in whatever way it might be so, a death. Additionally, when Max commits suicide, it is at the beckoning of Nicki Brand, who encourages Max to kill himself in order to move into the "new flesh." Thus, even in death, Max is becoming other than himself – not achieving resolution, but mutating into another flesh. Max's vision(s) afford viewers no mechanism of truth, and the refusal of the film to provide a coherency of subjecthood or of death itself reflects that unreliable vision. Through Cronenberg's narrative, we might consider Max Renn's vision(s) not as exceptional, but as a condition of life to which each of us are subject.

While *Videodrome* speaks to a technology that, while remaining relevant, preceded the development of many of the technologies – particularly the digital, the Internet – which have proliferated in recent years, the film remains relevant for rethinking embodiment as well as visual "information." The abjection that permeates the film, and the narrative itself, returns in Cronenberg's later film (*eXistenZ*) which does hinge on digital/Internet/gaming technologies. Abject materials, as in Burroughs and the 1983 Cronenberg piece, are everywhere in the 1999 *eXistenZ*: the holes in the human body that allow the networking in and out of the virtual world; the dissection and surgery of the amphibian/machine "pod"; the eating of mutant amphibians; the gutting of animals at the "trout farm." Although these are only a few of the multiplicitous scenes of abjection we witness, the film likewise refuses to disclose a properly bordered body, whose in's and out's are entirely delineable. "Between" materials bust, burst, and slime all over; but the between where the film closes maintains a similarity with *Videodrome*'s deliberate ambiguity over lines between real and imagined. Cronenberg's reality is one that fuses, and refuses to shore up pure divisions between, the real and the imagined, the real and its representation, the human and the machine, the living systems of the human body and the living systems of computer and gaming networks. Both films continue to be relevant in thinking about embodiment, and the queerness that *is* embodiment – and the "selfhood" that is both itself and something other than itself. The ideas presented in Cronenberg's films contest ideologies of purity that undergrid – as this project has demonstrated – racist, homophobic, and heteronormative encounters with others that insist that the visual/visible lends us the ultimate coherency that allows us to know, comprehend, and make legible that which is always already messy, between, and incoherent.

Cronenberg asks us to consider, through a reflection on how technologies interact with bodies, how it is that these myths of purity are myths of transcendence, and proposes that the body is always already networked – in contact – with "outside" materials. The networks that we are constantly engaging with – which are reflected in Cronenberg's work – are not the only means by which we are posthuman, or by which we are always already in contact with one another; they do, however, both function as *a* means of representing that ongoing contact, as well as working to represent the many other ways in which we are opened and opening by, with, and to that which is not-self. As Hotchkiss notes, *eXistenZ* "suggests not only that both cyberspace and film can figure the mind but also that the intermedial filmic presentation of cyberspace's virtual reality offers a representation of the workings of representation itself, not as a substitute for the real but as a means of exploring our cultural fantasies of subjectivity" (28). Thus, the meta-filmic concerns at work within both of Cronenberg's films not only challenge our conceptions of the strictly divisive lines between the real and the fictive, the human and the machine, the imagined and the material, but also examines how our concepts of these binaries effect who or what subjects are made possible through re-envisioning or re-representing embodiment itself.

***XXY*: Re-Visioning Narratives of Protection**

This project has continually staked a claim against notions of purity and legibility that have resulted in violence that often becomes rationalized and justified in the name of saving or protecting that supposed purity/legibility. While the *Nip/Tuck* episode discussed in this chapter deals with both mixed genealogies and (il)legibility, and Cronenberg's work addresses the connections between consumerism, technology, and media that inform the composition of the body/self (and therefore make null any claims to prior purity or isolation), this section of the

chapter confronts the violence that occurs in the name of pure distinctions of sex. As discussed in Chapter 3, both *Geek Love* and *Middlesex* demonstrate occasions of coercion and violence that are usually erased, or go unseen, becoming rhetorically eclipsed by the language of saviors and tragedy. Dunn's novel works to challenge the narratives of saviors and tragedy that permeate discourses surrounding infants with both physical impairments and "ambiguous" genitalia. As I also argued, *Middlesex* follows a protagonist who opts against surgery, a subject and desire that must be effaced in the process of legitimating normativizing surgeries. The 2007 film *XXY* similarly provides viewers with an on-screen protagonist that chooses against "corrective" surgery; as viewers, we pay witness to the coercion not only implemented by the social world of her peers and her community, but the medical practices and practitioners that also coercively and aggressively encircle the body of the intersexed individual. Most significantly, *XXY* offers viewers with an alternative narrative of protection and safety, one that refuses the erasure of this coercion and aggression.

Katrina Karkazis suggests, alongside Alice Dreger – whose work has played a significant role in the growth and development of the Intersex Society of North America (ISNA) – that "it will be familiarity with intersexuality that will take away its supposed strangeness . . . Rather than not cover intersexuality in the media, a more productive tack would be to cover it in a way that seeks to reduce stigma by refraining from sensationalizing the issue" (264). *XXY* refuses the tendency to sensationalize, and also seeks to humanize bodies that have continually been over-medicalized, and dehumanized (as noted in Chapter 3 of this project) not only by medical jargon, but by clinical photography and repetitive clinical examination of the genitals. On his blog "Living Kallmann's Syndrome: Living my life with Kallmann's Syndrome," Nick Chaleunphone writes: "I hope this movie goes mainstream and that people can run out and see the movie. If it

does, I expect, i [sic] maybe called to explain what intersex is and what XXY is like and what it's like growing up intersex. I know this movie has a commonality with me and every intersex out their [sic]." In an email exchange, Nick stated that, "It's great that people are doing more research on Intersex people. I think the more people know that intersex people exist the more people will understand that their [sic] is more than Male and female." This is precisely the reason why *XXY* offers viewers not just a view of the social dangers faced by intersexed people, but also works to expose a complex issue that has mostly remained in the domain of the unspoken and unfamiliar. Karkazis notes that parents often opt for infant surgical intervention because of the emergency they feel in response to a lack of familiarity and the lack of sufficient understanding of the medical jargon used to explain what most have not heard of.

Fausto-Sterling asks her readers to consider: "But what would be the psychological consequences of taking the alternative road – raising children as unabashed intersexuals? On the surface that track seems fraught with peril." Fausto-Sterling suggests that this road encompasses those many normatively-charted spaces of bathrooms and schoolyards. This road entails entering a society that awaits without welcoming or habitable spaces. Yet what would be the consequences of embracing this perilous track? Sara Ahmed writes that, "So we walk on the path as it is before us, but it is only before us as an effect of being walked upon. A paradox of the footprint emerges. Lines are both created by being followed and are followed by being created. The lines that direct us, as lines of thought as well as lines of motion, are in this way performative" (16). As Ahmed suggests, norms are reiterated and perform certain lines of life, of ideology, and of embodiment. To embrace the endangered path of "raising children as unabashed intersexuals," then, would mean to make new lines, new tracks that could be followed; it would be to make more habitable spaces. Ahmed continues, stating that, "Deviation

leaves its own marks on the ground, which can even help generate alternative lines, which cross the ground in unexpected ways. Such lines are indeed traces of desire; where people have taken different routes to get to this point or that point" (20). *XXY* offers us an alternative route, and alternative understanding of what is meant by "protection" in the case of children born with "ambiguous" genitalia. As discussed in Chapter 3, doctors, parents, and others usually defend the decision to opt for surgery on intersexed infants as an exercise of choice in the name of protecting the child from the cruelty of society. As with Miss Lick in *Geek Love*, discussed in Chapter 3, most proponents of infant surgery consider themselves saviors, presuming the inevitable tragedy of life in such a body. Fausto-Sterling suggests that few "ambiguous" infants would make it into adulthood in "sexually diverse form." Although cited in Chapter 3, it is worth repeating Fausto-Sterling's words regarding the concerns articulated in such situations:

> Almost at once such infants are entered into a program of hormonal and surgical management so that they can slip quietly into society as "normal" heterosexual males or females. I emphasize that the motive is in no way conspiratorial. The aims of the policy are *genuinely humanitarian*, reflecting the wish that people be able to "fit in" both physically and psychologically. (469, Emphasis mine)

Released in 2007, *XXY* is an Argentine film[6] that works to contest the discourses that surround infants born with "ambiguous" genitalia, and presents viewers with the violence of coercion that so often masquerades as "protection." Set in the aftermath of a family's departure from Buenos Aires to a secluded house on the shores of Uruguay, *XXY* centers on the story of Alex. The family – comprised of father, Kraken (Ricardo Darín), mother Suli (Valeria Bertuccelli), and their child Alex (Inés Efron) – has been mostly isolated from urban contact or community; Kraken works as a biologist on the Uruguayan shore. Despite the seclusion of the family, the

film opens with the arrival of visitors, and we soon know the reason for their arrival. The family that stays with Kraken, Suli, and Alex are a family also comprised of three – father Ramiro (Germán Palacios), mother Erika (Carolina Peleritti), and their son Alvaro (Martín Piroyansky). It is quickly revealed that Ramiro's profession has to do with his visit; Ramiro, a plastic surgeon, has come to stay with the family by request of Alex's mother. Alex's mother Suli is interested in the services of Ramiro because her teenager, Alex (fifteen years old) was born intersexed, and Suli believes it in the best interest of her child to have surgery performed to mold her into a woman. Suli has grown increasingly concerned because Alex has stopped taking her[7] hormone pills. Alex's case, and the story we follow with/of her, is unique; this is not because cases of intersexed infants are all so unique, but because, as director Lucía Puenzo has suggested: "In Argentina and Italy, and other countries where the film has already been released, it created a debate on what seems almost impossible in our societies: an intersex body that has not been mutilated, and not only survives but demands the opportunity to be desired" (Tehrani). What we are presented with in *XXY* is, instead of a narrative of tragedy or a narrative of normative desires, a story of a liveable life, and an "occasion for flourishing." To reiterate the words of Judith Butler, discussed in Chapter 3, "resistance to coercive surgery moreover calls for an understanding that infants with intersexed conditions are part of the continuum of human morphology and ought to be treated with the presumption that their lives are and will be not only livable, but also occasions for flourishing" (4). *XXY* demonstrates this resistance, treating the life of Alex as a life of possibility, even if one that must be tread within a dangerous world.

Alex is not without her enemies. Not even in the quite rural community where Alex lives is she exempt from a very real threat of violence and persecution. After she reveals the secret of her biology to her best male friend Vando (Luciano Nobile), he disperses this information to

three other male classmates at school. In the latter half of the film, the results of this "betrayal" (as Alex calls it) come to fruition, when the three schoolmates Vando has informed assault Alex, pulling down her pants and demanding to see her genitalia. Though Alex is not raped, the violent attack on her body bespeaks of the endangerment of those who do not conform to the constructed binary of male or female.

Narratives of protection, as I have proposed them in this project, legitimize the destruction of, or violence toward, bodies that jeopardize a supposed whole and integrated body (of both the self and the norm). These narratives continue to avow the power of the dominant body (white male and heterosexual) in order to legitimize the extinguishing of those"other" bodies. In order to justify the violence of compulsive heteronormativity, bodies that "deviate" are constructed themselves as a threat to the health, well-being, and wholeness of a system of governing norms. *XXY*, however, reconstructs this narrative, and makes a new fiction – a deviant line, that makes way for new kinds of fictions, new kinds of lines that make for a less violent, and more habitable social space.

The varying responses to Alex's body conveyed by the characters in *XXY* reveal differing and shifting understandings of "protection" and "safety." Alex's mother Suli, for example, initially is the force seeking out Ramiro – and plastic surgery – for her child's well-being. Yet Suli's role gradually shifts over the course of the film. At the beginning of the film, she articulates the "generally humanitarian" concerns, which cover a road "fraught with peril." She desires the good and normal life for Alex. At this juncture, Suli sees the problem as, and in, Alex's body, rather than the social spaces in which her body exists. She expresses growing concern over Alex's recent refusal to continue taking hormones, and worries that, "her body will change…she will stop developing as a woman."[8] Suli expresses a fear of Alex's being infringed

upon by "the other" that threatens to overtake her body. The transitional moment for Suli's character takes place after Alex's attack by the aforementioned three school boys. In response to this attack, it is implicit that Suli begins to understand that the problem is not in Alex's body, but in the social body. Rather than suggesting that an attack of this nature warrants or justifies the surgery she initially desires for Alex, she lies curled in bed next to Alex and Alex's female friend. The visitors' stay following the attack is not lengthy, and Suli does not again articulate a desire for her teenage child either to have surgery or to continue taking hormones.

While Suli's conflicted and shifting responses to Alex suggest a notion of protection and safety and protection that is in revision, the somewhat juxtaposed figures of Kraken and Ramiro also reflect conflicting (and for Kraken, developing) notions of protection. Ramiro, the plastic surgeon, is constructed somewhat antithetically to Kraken, Alex's father. This is emphasized in the moment when the two families (all except Alex) convene around the dinner table and, after Ramiro attempts to force his son to drink wine, Kraken states "I can't stand bullying." Ramiro's dominant and coercive stance is aligned in relative opposition to Kraken's defense of the "bullied." While Ramiro believes Alex has a condition that needs fixing, Kraken believes that when she was born, her body was "perfect." In articulating this, a very different narrative of wholeness or integrity emerges. Rather than desiring Alex's body to conform to dominant fictions of wholeness, or reading her body as a tragedy, he immediately believes it to be "perfect" – an occasion for flourishing.

In conversation with Alvaro, Alex refers to Ramiro's occupation of cosmetic surgeon as that of a "butcher." Alex's use of the term "butcher" seems to carry larger connotations within the intersex community. In Katrina Karkazis' interview with Lisa Todd, Todd states that: "I have a very, very, very small amount of clitoral sensation. It's not completely dead, but it

doesn't do anything for me. God help me if I should every find the urologist who did this to me. I would call him a butcher" (231). Speaking to a medical community that tends to ignore the possibility of loss of clitoral feeling and sexual pleasure, Todd asserts that her urologist was, in fact, a butcher – and that the surgical intervention performed in her infancy yielded not protection or "fixing," but butchery. Emanating from Alex's character, her claim that Ramiro's work is not fixing, but butchery, reflects a growing discontent from adults who have undergone such surgery without a choice in the matter.

Defending his father's line of work, Alvaro contends that, "He doesn't butcher people. He fixes them." According to Alvaro, Ramiro works mostly on the correction of what Alvaro refers to as "deformities," and this concentration suggests his pertinence to Alex's presumed "deformity" that needs proper "fixing." While Alex alludes to the possible violence involved in the cutting of the body to alleviate "deformity," Alvaro elides the prospect of "butchery" involved, by creating a savior who both heals and fixes the supposedly sick. Ramiro's occupation, which involves the "fixing" of the "wrong" body, also overlaps with his desire to form his son Alvaro into a "proper" heterosexual man. The consistently evident concern over the masculinity and heterosexuality of his son emerges specifically in a moment towards the close of the film, as Ramiro and Alvaro sit beside one another after dark at the beach. After admitting to his son that he doesn't particularly like him, nor does he believe that Alvaro will have his father's "talent" (Alvaro's artistic drawings are diminished/feminized by Ramiro earlier in the film), Ramiro discovers that Alvaro has feelings for Alex: "Finally, good news," he says in response to this revelation, "I was afraid you were a fag."

While Ramiro's character does not explicitly convey the "humanitarian" concerns that have been addressed in this project, the language that converges around both his occupation and

his relationship with his son suggests that Ramiro *does* believe that his surgical work *and* his anxiety over his son's masculinity and heterosexuality are both driven by misguided "humanitarian" instincts. Interviewing clinicians, parents, and patients about the medical responses to infants born intersexed, as well as the lived experiences of both parents and children, Katrina Karkazis suggests that, "clinicians and parents sincerely believe that their interventions will improve a child's quality of life and thus find it hard to believe they could cause harm, or that individuals might come to regret the decisions made on their behalf" (267). As a surgeon, Ramiro does sincerely believe in surgical intervention as a means of improving the quality of one's life, and he likewise believes that his son's adherence to the norms of sexual desire (heterosexuality) and masculinity will afford him a better quality of life. But Ramiro's heteronormative conception of quality of life blinds him to the potential harm it might inflict on a patient (such as Alex, who does not *desire* the surgery), and to his own son (Alvaro), whose desires and actions do not conform to typical gender-roles and even orientation. Ramiro and Alvaro experience a constant strain on their relationship because of the expectations that Ramiro attempts to enforce in the name of quality of life ("successful" masculinity and heterosexuality).

Ramiro presumes that one who does not fit morphological or sexual norms is less capable of operating in the social world – and accordingly, it is individual bodily or sexual shapes that must be altered. Ramiro never expresses concerns over the social that deems these shapes the only possible or permissible ones, but rather seems to simply accept the very strictly demarcating lines that separate biological sex and sexuality itself. When Ramiro finds, for example, that his son has feelings for Alex, he is contented to know that his son is not the "fag" he worried he might be. In Ramiro's mind, then, Alex (quite simply) *is* a female, whose present illegibility simply needs the restorative powers offered by the medical industry (which heals, purportedly

making that unreadability readable); there is nothing queer (to Ramiro) about Alvaro's desire for Alex, and nothing possibly queer that might occur in that multidirectional and complex desire – a complexity that is evident to the viewer, in the sexual encounter that reveals Alex anally penetrating Alvaro. Thus, Ramiro's desire for healing or restoring a body to its supposed coherency of biological sex (or his "fixing" of "deformities") reveals that he believes himself to be acting in the best interest (eliding normative and surgical coercion) of his patients (or, as in Alex's case, potential patients). Katrina Karkazis describes the relationship between clinicians and parents in cases of infants born intersexed:

> Rather than helping them through the understandable mourning of the loss of the 'perfect child,' clinicians instruct parents early on to view their children as abnormal or pathological and requiring intervention, intervention that may help to 'restore' the child…If given time, however, parents can move past the initial fear and discomfort to see another reality: that they have given birth to a beautiful baby. Too often, however, parents do not have the opportunity to talk honestly, intimately, and at length about their feelings and experiences, including the freedom to explore the full range and meaning of their experience, which might include the sadness and difficulties engendered by their child, but also the strength, joy, love, and hope. (183)

Ramiro's desire to help Alex through the power of surgery resonates with Karkazis' description of clinicians who approach parents with the assumption that a child born intersexed requires intervention that can "restore" the child to morphological ideals, based on the presumption of a dimorphic system of sex and gender. Yet in the immediate sense of urgency often brought on by clinicians in addressing parents (who also, Karkazis points out, experience confusion due to

unfamiliarity with intersex "conditions" in addition to the alienating and overwhelming medical terminologies employed by medical authority), what might get lost within this experience is the joy of the child herself. In grieving for the destroyed ideal of the "perfect child" (which, as Karkazis points out, is understandable), what gets overlooked is the "perfection" that might already be present. The dynamics between Ramiro and Kraken in the film reveal these differing approaches to both protection and perfection.

As I have mentioned, Ramiro sees his work as the healing of the sick, as an act of mercy that allows a body to persist more operably within the norms that make life livable. Where Ramiro does not evidence any consideration of the possibility of a life of flourishing and operability in the social world outside of the prospect of "fixing," Kraken – while still caught in a tormented anxiety in regard to the social world that poses a real threat to Alex – makes room for both imagining the possibility of a life of flourishing and for understanding *protection* and *safety* in alternative ways. Ramiro does not question the mechanisms of supposed protection that continue to uphold coercive norms and justify heteronormative violence; Kraken, however, comes to interrogate protection, even while he experiences anguish over Alex's "condition." Early in the film Kraken and Alex discuss the recent revelation to Vando, and Alex asks him, "If I'm so special, why can't I talk about it?" While Kraken and Suli opted not to have normativizing surgeries when Alex was an infant, numerous references in the film suggest that other measures have been taken to protect her from the social world. Not only has Alex not been permitted to "talk about it," but the family repeatedly asserts that they moved from Buenos Aires to a remote part of Uruguay in order to avoid the possibility of increased confrontations within a more populated and urban region. While the circumstances suggest that Kraken and Suli have repressed or hidden Alex's body, this assumption makes a turn when Kraken articulates that

these measures have been taken merely to protect Alex until an age (which, for Alex, seems to be fifteen) that permits one to make a decision for oneself about the body.

In one of the last scenes of *XXY*, Kraken and Alex discuss choice as it pertains to two separate, but related, circumstances. Kraken asks Alex whether or not she would like him to go to the police in order to report her attackers. Preceding the conversation, viewers watch Kraken pull up to the police station, sit in his car, and decide to leave. Because of his reaction, and the conversation with Alex that follows, it is implicit that Kraken feels this is a decision Alex, and not he, should make, since, as he tells Alex in this scene, "everybody'll find out." Alex replies to this concern by saying, "Let them." In conjunction with this conversation, Kraken – before asking her about the police – tells Alex that he is "looking after her," he says, "until you can choose." "What?" Alex asks. "Whatever you want," he responds. "What if there isn't a decision to make?" Alex replies, and her father simply nods. Kraken can be seen in opposition to the parental figure of Ramiro, who is consistently seen as domineering, attempting to pressure his son into a credible and sanctioned version of masculinity. Kraken, on the other hand, allows his child to take shape; rather than forcing her into the binarized and clean-cut delineations between male or female, he allows her to choose, even if this means ambiguity. And in Alex's determination not to make a decision – which, of course, is very much a decision – and in her decision to let "them" (the community) "find out" (about her biology), Alex provides a representation of a different way of living, a new line cut out to make way for alternative routes to follow. Ahmed suggests that, "Inhabiting a body that is not extended by the skin of the social means the world acquires a new shape and makes new impressions" (20). Alex's attackers evidence the lack of extended social skin to provide a habitable space, yet Alex's world acquires a new shape, in both her decision to "let them" know, and her decision to "not decide."

In addition to presenting not *only* the coercion and manipulation of her community, *XXY* also brings to the screen the coercion of the medical community and the coercion of the medical knife. The film also engages the fictions of protection that work to proclaim to "save" the other, as well as those which work to preserve the coherence of the self and the norm, as discussed in Chapter 3. The patriarchal figure in Alex's life is not threatened by the indistinguishable or "illegible" shapes that the body takes; rather, he believes Alex's body to be perfect, and protects Alex not through coercing her, but though nurturing and supporting her. While most parental and patriarchal figures in similar circumstances presume that "protection" lies in the act of coercion, Kraken exercises a different kind of masculinity, and "protection" is in the absence of coercion or violence, rather than in its presence, or exertion.

The emergence of the ISNA (Intersex Society of North America) and other intersex activist and support groups, over the course of the 1990s and into the present, have been one of the centers of dispute and recognition in challenging the typical response of immediate surgical intervention in infants. These groups have functioned as one of the most vocal and influential forces in contesting the concept that surgical intervention works as a mechanism of "protection" rather than harm, as many adults have come forward in anger, frustration, and resistance regarding the surgeries imposed upon them as infants. In addition, some parents have also come to regret the decision they made in the past about their childrens' bodies. Karkazis describes two parents she interviewed about the choice they made for surgical intervention:

> Ramona Diaz whose daughter has PAIS and who wishes she had not chosen genital surgery for her daughter has found another way to deal with her disappointment and sadness: she has become an advocate for delaying surgery until the child is old enough to decide: "I feel very bad. I hurt because she hurts.

> I just want to spare people everything that she's been through. I feel the same way that a lot of intersexed people do now: Let that person make the decision when they are ready. If they are ever ready to say, 'Yes, I want to do this,' or, 'No, I don't want to do this.' Let them have the say in the matter. Not the medical profession. Not the parents." And for Rebecca Davis, whose two daughters have CAH, the stresses associated with their reaching puberty resulted in a broken marriage. A psychiatrist explained to her that having a chronic illness in a family creates an enormous amount of pressure, but she says, "I didn't have a great marriage to start with, but even those with really good marriages, most of them didn't make it." She is still struggling to cope with the anger of one of her daughters: "I can't make it right. Part of what she's so upset about is that she feels raped, and in a way she really was, and I couldn't help it. She can't see that I couldn't help it, all she can see is that I let it happen and ask, why didn't I protect her? Oh, God, that hurts." (209-210)

Both of these parents advocate delaying surgery until a decision can be made by the child, allowing the prospective surgical patient to make a choice that has ultimately irreversible effects on the body of the infant. Many patients, especially women, have lost all or most sensation (and the capacity for sexual pleasure) due to surgery; in addition, as Karkazis points out, there are often multiple surgeries (not just one) and dehumanizing medical examinations that are required over time, which are not fully considered or disclosed to parents before making the choice to surgically intervene. Although parents may be less familiar with the "condition" of intersex, and may also be alienated by the overt jargon utilized in describing both the "condition" and the possible routes of "solution," parents nonetheless often believe that (as previously mentioned)

they are making a choice to surgically intervene in order to "protect" the child. Parent Rebecca Davis, whose response Karkazis notes above, thus issues a poignant challenge to those beliefs. Davis, who regrets her decision to let surgeons intervene in her infant's body, seems most pained by the use of that very term: *protect*. Her daughter's question – *why didn't you* protect *me?* – forces Davis to confront the oppositional understanding that the once-infant expresses in regard to the decision made for, and on, her body. Protection, according to her daughter, would have been to protect her body from surgical intervention, and from the "rape" of her body and her will that took place as an infant. Davis, who implies that she believed her decision *was* made in order to do *precisely* that (protect her), must confront the voice of her daughter that speaks back, who argues for a new understanding of what "protection" really means, through issuing a question: why didn't you protect me?

While narratives of protection aim to present coercion and violence toward marginalized bodies as protection of a "whole" and "pure" body, Kraken and Alex present us with a narrative in which protection is not called upon for the sake of the three boys who attack Alex (as dominant narratives of protection attempt to do), but for the sake of the body under attack. Judith Butler suggests that there is a "primary tie" that binds together individual bodies and "others" – that human bodies are fundamentally dependent upon those "others" for growth and flourishing, that "Part of understanding the oppression of lives is precisely to understand that there is no way to argue away this condition of a primary vulnerability, of being given over to the touch of the other, even if, or precisely when, there is no other there, and no support for our lives." While all bodies, Butler argues, are primarily vulnerable, that vulnerability is shaped by patriarchal, white, and heteronormative value systems in which, "Certain lives will be highly protected, and the abrogation of their claims to sanctity will be sufficient to mobilize the forces

of war. And other lives will not find such fast and furious support and will not even qualify as 'grievable.'" (24). Which bodies and lives are protected – which are saved or kept safe, which are defendable and which are disposable – are products of the fictions power creates in order to sustain itself. Narratives of protection that discursively transform acts of bodily war into acts of love and protection continue to violate under the name of the violated, perpetrate under the name of perpetrated. This fiction constructs the white, male, able-bodied and heterosexual body as under threat, and continues to justify the violences that proceed from the endangerment of encroaching "others" by deeming those "others" a threat to both its bodily constitution and coherence; it harkens back to an imagined originary moment of purity, in which coherence, and legibility, were present in the "body" of norms themselves. This fiction of power also seeks to sustain the power of norms that govern both human anatomy and life. Because of the "power and danger" (in the words of Mary Douglas) that are held in margins, the threat to the readability and dominance of those norms themselves also continues to justify the violence that proceeds from the fear of jeopardized "safety." As Karkazis points out,

> Bodies with atypical or conflicting biological markers of gender are troublesome because they disturb the social body; they also disrupt the process of determining an infant's place in the world. Gender-atypical genitals (and bodies) create anxiety about the borders of properly gendered subjects and a desire to reaffirm these borders. In a culture that requires clear gender division – a culture in which, to paraphrase Michel Foucault, we truly need a true sex – gender-atypical bodies threaten an entire system of laws, rights, responsibilities, and privileges built on notions of discrete and binary gender…The breach or schism in the social order caused by the birth of a baby with atypical genitals (and thus no obvious gender

> assignment) produces a crisis that must be addressed because it threatens social norms. (96)

The threat posed to social norms, and to the systems of sex and gender that continue to be reiterated and performed – and, as Karkazis puts it, are "self-referential" (139) – seek the production of the same shapes, that prohibit human variation and diversity, in order to sustain a coherent social body. The keeping safe of the social order precedes the consideration of the protection of the infant's body, and thus deems that body in need of immediate intervention. Coherence of the systems that order, classify, and codify human bodies warrants an emergency of totality and legibility of the entire social body, and the legibility of all human bodies – as well as the binarized system of sex that organizes bodies, desires, and orientations according (primarily) to their genitalia.

Safety and protection, of course, are not only fictional concepts produced by the interstices of power and organization that seek to protect norms and white, heterosexual, male bodies. Protection is also that which is denied to those bodies that disrupt the social order, the social body, that protects itself through coercive interventions. The lives that are not protected, not made safe, through the perpetuation of these narratives, are by all means lives that should be, but are not, protected. *XXY* reminds us of whose bodily constitution is truly under threat, and suggests that the dynamics of a "protection" narrative must incorporate, and value, the body who is truly in need of protection. Narratives resembling *XXY* must continue to proliferate; the bodies of attackers/violators can no longer be constructed as those who are endangered by the proximity of "the other." We must no longer permit the justification of saving, when that saving means coercion. While I do not seek, here, to extrapolate the multitude of ways in which narratives of protection work to efface coercion in the name of saving an imagined once-coherent (and now

"under threat") body, I do wish to suggest that such narratives are extremely pervasive and have very material effects on bodies and lives in the world. While this project only gestures at a few instances within which these fictions are in operation, I believe it is a pressing need that we continue to map and analyze their many constellational contours.

In-Between

E. Ann Kaplan calls for the production of films that show viewers identities that are "in between," arguing for "how much this subjectivity-in-between also needs to be worked through in the process of making art. The process also enables spectators as well to work through the complex situations of being in-between" (237). Significantly, each of the visual texts addressed in this chapter demonstrate just that. Despite her initial firm belief in pure racial origins, and her desperate clinging to that mythology, Ariel from *Nip/Tuck* uncovers the histories of contact that have come before her. Being neither pure white nor pure black, Ariel's body is not entirely either – even if her skin appears (pale) white. In denying Ariel her desire to recover purity, the episode both challenges the notion of the body/the "Other" as readable and undermines dominant conceptions of identity as untouched, and unchanging essence. She is in between, rather than on one or the other side of a line. Likewise, *Videodrome* presents viewers with an identity that is in between itself and something other than itself; there is no body or self that is protected from its multiple forms of contact with the world. Max Renn is in between the real and the hallucinated, and his consumption practices reveal that he is at once machine and man, and that the objects around him cannot but intercross with the flesh. In addition to its critique of the coercion inflicted on infants born with ambiguous genitalia, *XXY* also presents viewers with an identity in between – in between male and female, in between child and adult, in between sexualities/objects of desire. Alex's betweenness of body and being demonstrate betweenness

not only as a mechanism of resisting the instituted practices of performing and reiterating the same lines of possibility, but as an occasion for flourishing. The film also offers identification in-between, between viewers and the identity confronted in the film. As Nick Chaleunphone, who is "living Kallmann's Syndrome," puts it in his blog about *XXY*: "I know this movie has a commonality with me and every intersex…"

The introduction to this project concentrated on the work of Sara Ahmed and Kelly Oliver, and suggested that their work might help us to develop a more "loving look." While Ahmed refuses the narratives of vision that insist on readable surfaces, and suggests that histories of contact can be concealed or hidden from the straight surfaces we encounter, Oliver insists that an acknowledgement of the invisible, and the fullness and presence of what exists in the "space between" bodies might help us to more lovingly approach others. Oliver states that, "the *between* is missing from dominant conceptions of vision" (65). This project has emphasized that *between* the visible and the invisible, *between* the consumer and products, *between* the real and unreal, *between* male and female, *between* the lines of texts, exists not nothing, but a full, dense space. Each of these visual texts emphasizes the fullness of these between spaces, and it also challenges the assumption that one can inhabit anything but the in-between. The not-between proves, in these texts, to be a product of the social and cultural norms that perform, again and again, the false promise of legible and stable bodily being and selfhood. Resisting the age of legibility that promises the ultimate readability of bodies, each of these texts contends with the assumptions about the seen, the unseen, and the in-between, that have continued to dominate the U.S. imagination over the course of the past century.

Conclusion
Kinect: Posthuman Bodies in Contact

In a U.S. society that continues to proliferate its "posts," it is unsurprising that with such proliferation comes an increasing suspicion of the implementation of such a wary prefix. The prefix denotes an aftermath, a foreclosure of past from present, and a bounded space and time. In an era in which postmodernism, postcolonialism, posthumanism and post-identity continue to raise significant questions about nations, identities, bodies, and violence, so too have arisen a clamor of voices decrying the (in)accuracies of suggesting that there is anything "post" about modernism, colonialism, humanism, or identity. "Post" problematically suggests an a beyond-ness and an over-ness; a state or position that has long been hailed as the place reserved for the privileged (white, male, heternormative) body, "post" connotes transcendence. While the tethers of modernism, humanism, colonialism, and identity have all but been loosened or unbound, it has been such "post" explorations that do not merely formulate a contained past and bracketed futurity – but work to re-read embodiments as they are striated and situated, marked within the fields of the social, historical, political, and economic. Though some imaginings of "postness" do suggest "overness" or "beyondness," there are still many interrogations of "postness" that call for a re-framing of present understandings of the ways in which bodies are entangled in worlds, from which disentanglement is an impossibility. It is often through "posts" – and particularly, as I argue here, through investigating the "posthuman" body – that we can re-imagine bodies (individual, geographic, national) and argue that their created borders and their imagined purities are just that: created and imaginary. Posthumanism challenges the concept of transcendence altogether, and thus works to destroy modernist and humanist paradigms that insist on the possibility of stability and singularity of identity. The violence done in the name of transcendent or idealized "whole" bodies is thus exposed for what it is – a fantasy whose contours have very

real and material effects in the world. The last chapter of this project peripherally addressed posthumanism in the context of Cronenberg's *Videodrome* and *eXistenZ*, and I would like to conclude this project by suggesting what a continued interrogation of what it means to be "posthuman" might offer us in reconceiving of embodiment as being, "re-integrated with machine parts or across various networks" and as an ongoing negotiation of, "being rhythmed across different sets of relations" (Halberstam and Livingston 18). The perpetual and ongoing contact between the insides and outsides of bodies, across various networks, might be particularly evident in an examination of the effects of technology on the body; however, those examinations might open us to understanding that this always already in-contact is a fundamental part of being embodied, and pertains to more than just technology.

Posthumanism, a particularly pervasive term in recent years, has come under criticism as failing to address embodied subjects, who cannot escape that embodiment to enter into the realm of the "post." Yet this fails to address the aspects of posthumanism that very ardently work to destroy prevailing rhetoric which serves to justify or rationalize racist and heteronormative violence that persists in American society. Posthumanism works to dissect prevailing notions of "otherness" that insist on pure, whole, integrated bodies – notions that continually promulgate violence, colonization, racism, sexism, and homophobia in the name of saving that supposedly pure body from the infringement of "others." Thus posthumanism does not rely solely on a concept of beyond-ness or past-ness of humanism. It works rather to challenge the grounds on which one comes to make such claims to (or of) whole coherence. As N. Katherine Hayles has noted, "the posthuman should not be depicted as an apocalyptic break with the past" (134). The posthuman is only post because it was – is – always already post; such postness, then, negates any reliance on the transcendent, beyond, or over. Nostalgia and mourning for imagined

moments of past purity and unification are re-conceived in the posthuman body, as an embrace of inner-alterities – of constant mutating and re-configuring bodies and identities. Eva Hayward comes to further understand her body through the body of a starfish, claiming the re-ness of her own body – the "re-generating" bounds of her body – unceasing re-configurement: "Re-grow, re-differentiate, re-pattern, re-member, re-nucleate: our bodily structures, our biodynamics, are materially enacted through ongoing relationships with the world, as part of that world" (76). Posthuman bodies are always already regenerating, always already altering their dimensions. It is through posthuman philosophy, in part, that we might better understand the interdependence, inter(con)textualities and vulnerabilities of embodiment.

The television advertisement for a newly released version of video gaming system Xbox 360, called "Kinect," recently appeared, and it eerily evokes the "bioports" of Cronenberg's *eXistenZ*.[62] The commercial seductively tells consumers that, "You are the controller." Upon visiting the website for Kinect, one is confronted again with this claim: "You are the controller. No gadgets, no gizmos, just you!" The human-machine or machine-human contact – even integration – seems to be celebrated, and haunts the potential consumer with the attractive tagline. Yet, upon further examination, the website for Kinect reveals both a fear of technological invasion of the body, and a desire for transcendence of the material connection and contact between human and machine/technology. Below the tagline, the website reads: "Kinect brings games and entertainment to life in extraordinary new ways without using a controller. Imagine controlling music and movies with the wave of a hand or the sound of your voice. With Kinect, *technology evaporates*, letting the natural magic in all of us shine" (Emphasis mine). The product is thus paradoxically presented to consumers. While the human body becomes integrated with machinery, with technology, the human body at once triumphs over – transcends

– that technology, as the technology itself evaporates. Likewise, under a heading that asks "What is Kinect?" the advertisement responds: "Magic Disguised as Technology."

This aversion to acknowledging technology as technology recalls the narratives of purity, isolation, and protection that form the basis of this project. The advertisement both seductively presents the "kinect" between the human and machine, while also assuaging fears of potential overtake or invasion of the human body by technology. Since technology "evaporates," and since it is, after all, not technology to begin with – but magic – the human body continues to be depicted as a pure and isolatable entity, whose protection from contact is guaranteed by the disappearance of the technological. The product name connotes a connection between the human body and technology. Kinesiology is the study of human movement and the human muscular system, and Kinect connects human motion and muscle with the machine itself: "Controller-free gaming means full body play. Kinect responds to how you move. So if you have to kick, then kick. If you have to jump, then jump.. You already know how to play. All you have to do now is to get off the couch." Kinect *connects* human motion and the machine. The last line suggests that the only requirement for consumers – since the physical controller placed between human and machine has been eliminated – is to "get off the couch." The implications of this are that technology has material effects on the body, thus making the effects of contact between machine and human (in addition to consumption) particularly evident. The virtual, then, is not only the virtual, but the real; and vice versa. When the technology "evaporates" in the consumerist equation presented in Kinect's website advertisement, so too does the contact made between inside and out, and the consumer is protected not only from having to acknowledge that his consumption in fact effects other bodies, but that his body is effected by the networking between himself and the machine. Contact simply becomes elided,

and its place is taken by magic. Because the contact between gamer and game are no longer visible (with the removal of the physical controller), and the interface has become the body itself, that contact is denied; in fact, it has "evaporated." The advertisements work simultaneously to charm consumers with the prospect of magic that protects the self and body from the supposed infiltration and overtake of technology – leaving them with their assumed coherent and legible bodies intact – and to attract consumers to the idea of the connectivity and contact that might open us to truly rethinking how our bodies are worked and reworked through their contact with outside material.

Posthumanism is not about transcendence, and not about the evaporation of contact. Rather, it is about the contact and mixing that is always already ongoing. Each chapter of this project has argued against an age of legibility; and in each chapter, that legibility has been linked to misconceptions about embodiment. Posthumanism helps us to reconceive of embodiment not as the possibility of moving beyond, over, or past, but as the inevitable moving within and across. It might be with a serious consideration of this field that we come to generate more ethical ways of (un)seeing, and (un)reading, one another – in acknowledgement of our own self-othering, and the illegibilities that accompany all being in the world, including our own. As I have argued throughout this project, contact – as well as the evidence of contact – is often invisible. Posthuman studies might help us to understand that the signs of contact are not always visible – as with the lack of an intermediary controller in "kinect" – but that our bodies are nonetheless in contact with not just technology, but other outside material and other bodies.

Endnotes

[1] This commentary by Michael Savage took place on his radio program *Savage Nation* on August 14, 2008. The transcripts of this commentary are available at http://mediamatters.org/research/200808180003. Access date: 19 July 2009.

[2] See Chapter 2, in discussing Judith Butler's concept of "primary vulnerability" of the body.

[3] See Chapter 1, in the context of *Invisible Man*, in which the narrator is instructed on multiple occasions to "stay in his place."

[4] From Merleau-Ponty's "Intertwining – The Chiasm." I also discuss the term intertwining further in Chapter 3.

[5] While every book, as I have argued, is not readable in the manner that the cliché, "I can read you like a book," presumes, I suggest the Burroughs' text, known particularly for its unreadability, might remind us of the unreadability of all texts, all books, all others. Its proliferation of abject material and the abject characteristics of the novel itself – and the relationship between abjection and legibility – are discussed further in the chapter itself.

[6] Implicit in Haiken's argument is also the issue of suffering – which is likewise referenced by theorist of aesthetic surgery, Kathy Davis. Kathy Davis explores this issue when writing about plastic surgery. Davis examines the Dutch "Choices in Care" debate that waged in the 1980s. Previous to the eighties, plastic surgery was sought less frequently, and incorporated into the Dutch basic healthcare package. But with the increase of surgeries being sought at this time, the medical industry sought more rigid guidelines for qualification. These guidelines became very problematic and contradictory relatively quickly, and it was only a matter of time before plastic surgery was completely excluded from the basic healthcare package and became wholly privatized. Davis conveys her investment in exploring this case – along with her investment in questions of plastic surgery more generally – as questions of bodies which may feel they "suffer" enough that they seek alteration, asking "when an individual's suffering has gone beyond an acceptable limit" (68). When plastic surgery was omitted from the healthcare plan, Davis suggests, the questions underlying such modes of suffering were also omitted: "the Dutch 'solution' was problematic in that it absolved the Dutch public from the bothersome task of having to wonder why some of its citizens might feel that they could not live with their bodies. There was no longer a need to entertain the uncomfortable possibility that something was amiss with Dutch culture if cosmetic surgery was the only avenue for some individuals to a 'normal' life" (69).

[7] Neal A. Lester writes that Middleton A. Harris's *The Black Book* (1974) demonstrates how early straightening products emerged, citing a *New York Times* article from February 9, 1859: "Hodgon, the Great African Hair Unkinker, invented a process to straighten hair and expected great financial rewards. He . . . invited all sons and daughters of Ham to a live demonstration. . . . A dishpan with a mysterious concoction was put over a gas burner, and when the potion got warm it was applied to one side of a wooly head. What had been tight curls was suddenly 'straight as a coon's leg; as glossy as a wet beaver's back; and several inches in length.' (Harris 190)" (qtd. in Lester 207).

[8] In some cases, as in the case of Max-Disher-turned-Matthew-Fisher, it is presumed that this indeterminable lineage derived from name changes and the work of Black-No-More, Incorporated.

[9] As Lester notes, some African-American songwriters even "cashed in" on this trend.

[10] Lester also accounts for the many writers who have approached this issue: "Among academics, black feminist theorists bell hooks ('Straightening Our Hair') and Michelle Wallace ('Anger in Isolation: A Black Feminist's Search for Sisterhood') have written extensively on the culturally, racially, and gender-specific communal rituals around hair straightening among black women. The chapter "Hair: The Straight and Nappy of It All" is included in Kathy Russell, Midge Wilson, and Ronald Hall's *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color among African Americans* (1992). Noliwe M. Rooks' *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women* (1996) is one of the most comprehensive scholarly treatments of the hair issue. Authors Tina McElroy Ansa, Gwendolyn Brooks, Ed Bullins, Lorraine Hansberry, Zora Neale Hurston, Tayari Jones, Adrienne Kennedy, Dominique LaBaw, Melissa Linn, Benilde Little, Audre Lorde, Dudley Randall, Dori Sanders, Natasha Tarpley, Alice Walker, and George C. Wolfe—to name a few—write hair politics into their explorations of African-American culture generally and of African-American women's realities specifically" (206).

[11] Ellison's novel significantly proliferates with references to Booker T. Washington, and this early scene of *Invisible Man* incorporates a number of such references. While I do not analyze the continued emphasis on Booker T. Washington in this chapter, the multiple references to him as an historical figure relate to the themes of stasis and mobility I focus on in this chapter. Preceding the narrator's speech, he muses on his past: "On my graduation day I delivered an oration in which I showed that humility was the secret, indeed, the very essence of progress [. . .] Everyone praised me and I was invited to give the speech at a gathering of the town's leading white citizens" (17). This latter speech is the one I have mentioned above. The language of humility that permeates the situations in which the narrator finds himself allude to the work of Washington both implicitly and explicitly throughout the novel. The encouragement of "humility" reveals itself as the guise for a white world which wishes the perpetual detainment of the racial "other." "In those pre-invisible days," states Ellison's narrator, "I visualized myself as a potential Booker T. Washington" (18). The narrator begins his speech by quoting Washington, and later the narrator is encouraged and stunned when Jack, the leader of a communist group called the Brotherhood, believes he can become the next Washington These references are extremely important to the issue of containment/detainment which permeates the novel. W.E.B. Dubois' reflection on Washington Washington in *The Souls of Black Folk* is worthwhile to discuss in conjunction with Ellison's novel and the references to Washington that occur therein. While Dubois recognizes the benefits resulting from Washington's work, he addresses Washington's Atlanta Compromise with a critical approach. Notably, when the narrator of *Invisible Man* quotes Booker T. Washington, it is material derived from the Atlanta Compromise. Dubois critiques Washington, stating that

> Mr. Washington represents in Negro thought the old attitude of adjustment and submission [. . .] it has been claimed that the Negro can survive only through submission. Mr. Washington distinctly asks that black people give up, at least for the present, three things, -
> First, political power,
> Second, insistence on civil rights,
> Third, higher education of Negro youth -

(37-38)

Dubois' critique of Washington resides in his objection to Washington's insistence on humility and submission, as is evident in the above passages. This advocacy for submission relates directly to the plight of Ellison's narrator throughout *Invisible Man*. Washington, as he is portrayed by both DuBois and the narrator of Ellison's text, professes a philosophy of submission that insists upon stasis, even in its rhetorical implications of movement.

[12] "The Brotherhood had both science and history under control" (381).

[13] The narrator's first speech with the Brotherhood leaves the Brotherhood uncertain about his place with them. One of the brothers suggests that the speech was "wild, hysterical, politically irresponsible and dangerous," (349), and "the antithesis of the scientific approach" (350). Brother Jack states that the narrator must be trained; he suggests, "All is not lost. There's hope that our wild but effective speaker may be tamed" (351). Again, this enunciates the desire for detainment/detention, and stasis. Although the Brotherhood wishes him to speak, he must first be "tamed", in other words, he must be "civilized" in his speech. Again, his tongue must take on the training, the disciplining, enforced by power. Following this speech, the narrator goes to meet and train with Brother Hambro; and upon his completion of studying, Brother Jack assigns the narrator as spokesman of the Harlem District. In this conversation, Jack again reminds the narrator that to "move," he must "stay in his place": "You must not underestimate the discipline, Brother. It makes you answerable to the entire organization for what you do. Don't underestimate the discipline. It is very strict, but within its framework you are to have full freedom to do your work" (360). Under the guise of "freedom" within "discipline," the narrator must again be locked into a space which prohibits his tongue, and forces a kind of swallowing of utterance, a tempering of motion, a structuring of self that answers to the policed and pre-ordained forms approved by Brother Jack.

[14] See page 33 in *Invisible Man*.

[15] See notes on Merleau-Ponty in Chapter 2.

[16] Throughout the text, not only language, but rhythm, is a place of contention and struggle; rhythm is a way and a space in which dominant and resistant powers exercise themselves. The narrator's dedication to speeches, music, and writing speak to, of, and with these spaces. "And so I play the invisible music of my isolation" writes Ellison in the prologue; he continues, "The last statement doesn't seem just right, does it? But it is; you hear this music simply because music is heard and seldom seen, except by musicians. Could this compulsion to put invisibility down in black and white be thus an urge to make music of invisibility?" (14) Rhythm, in Ellison's text, is inextricably tied to the tongue and the word, even in the absence or disciplining of those tongues or words. As this quote evidences, Ellison's text serves to create its own rhythm, to bring forth a tongue that speaks of the invisibility of those absences and disciplinings of the tongue. Throughout *Invisible Man*, structure and organization in musical composition is likened to the structuring and organizing of bodies – the giving form to that which truly has no inherent or essential form but, like jazz music, is improvisational.

[17] See previous note.

[18] For a direct quotation from Ginsberg's letter, see Ron Loewinsohn. Loewinsohn takes this

from Letters to Allen Ginsberg, 1953-1957. Ed. Ron Padgett and Anne Waldman. New York: Full Court, 1982.

[19] Amelia Jones criticizes theorist of culture, Christopher Lasch, who claims that, "The narcissist [. . .] cannot identify with someone else without seeing the other as an extension of himself without [. . .] obliterating the other's identity." Jones states that, "Lasch makes this argument on the basis of his assumption that the other has a stable identity that is thus being obliterated by the narcissist's specifically *performative*, but ultimately stabilizing, projections. I am suggesting here, through Merleau-Ponty, that such projection of the self is, rather, a marker of the *instability* of both self and other (of their chiasmic intertwining) and that this, from the point of view of those who have every stake in dislocating the mythological, transcendent self of modernism, is a positive thing (49). This should be kept in mind when I introduce Merleau-Ponty's concept of "intertwining" in the following paragraphs. The concept of a self or nation as that which is a cohesive, coherent, readable and formulated body is derived from a transcendent view that such a body is somehow essentially and necessarily always already enclosed within tangible borders, which pre-exist their mobilization through performance by embodied subjects (as with the crossover point between California and Nevada). In Jones' rejection of Lasch's theory of self/other relations, and her adopting of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concept of "chiasmic intertwining," she claims that the "self" is in constant shaping with its touching "the other." To acknowledge this is not to annihilate the other by seeing that "other" as an extension of oneself, but rather is to recognize the ways in which human beings are in a constant state of intertwining.

[20] This is largely why this question of denying contact is so important. With the denial of contact, the interactions between bodies which is most fervently denied is almost always exploitative and coercive contact. It is the violence of this invisibility of erasure/effacement that this argument is most invested in counteracting.

[21] Merleau-Ponty's body of work has been utilized within numerous fields of study, not without critique. Although Merleau-Ponty's philosophies have been crucial to theories of perception and embodiment emanating in the wake of his theories, his positions on both (perception and embodiment) have often been called into question in the absence of adequate attention to the various ways in which embodiment and perception function in tandem with how bodies experience gender, sex, class, race, age, and morphology. These are useful critiques, and especially useful when we apply these absent, consequential matters to the "matter" of bodies – how they see, and how they exist in space. Bodies are differentially valued and disciplined to take up space in different ways, as Grosz and Irigaray have noted in response to Merleau-Ponty. It is essential that we speak of Merleau-Ponty's "chiasmic intertwining" as a concept that must be subject to critical theories of embodiment, and I will extrapolate on this further in reading Judith Butler momentarily.

[22] The focus in this last work, as Elizabeth Grosz suggests, is on his development of the concept of "flesh": While it [the concept of flesh developed in his last work] does not displace perception as the thematic object of investigation, it is a more elementary and prior term, the condition of both seeing and being seen, of touching and being touched, and of their intermingling and possible integration, a commonness in which both subject and object participate, a single 'thing' folded back on itself. Whereas in his earlier works Merleau-

Ponty stresses the fundamental interimplication of the subject in the object and the object in the subject, in his last text he explores the interrelations of the inside and the outside, the subject and the object, one sense and another in a common flesh – which he describes as the 'crisscrossing' of the seer and the visible, of the toucher and the touched, the indeterminacy of the 'boundaries' of each of the senses, their inherent transposability, their refusal to submit to the exigencies of clear-cut separation or logical identity [. . .] Neither subject nor object can be conceived as cores, atoms, or nuggets of being, pure presence; not bounded entities, they 'interpenetrate,' mingle (95-96). Merleau-Ponty's refusal to distinguish pure presences or identities, and his insistence on the unboundedness of entities, underlies its importance to this project. In conjunction with the dismissal of possible bodily purity, Merleau-Ponty proposes (particularly in "Intertwining – The Chiasm") that the line demarcating the flesh of the body from the "flesh of the world" is not a determinable dividing line or edge.

[23] Reference to Irigaray's *Forgetting of Air*; see Chapter 1 for further discussion.

[24] See Introduction for further discussion of "submersion."

[25] A transcript of the interview, "How Communists Operate: An Interview with J. Edgar Hoover" was reprinted May 16, 2008 in U.S. News & World Report. The transcript is available at http://www.usnews.com/articles/news/national/2008/05/16/how-communists-operate-an-interview-with-j-edgar.html Access Date: 15 June 2009

[26] See Chapter 1 on *Black No More*.

[27] Additionally, as Mann notes, the white male body is threatened as the protagonist's female companion is ultimately a figure of sexual perversion, whose sexuality threatens to exceed its bounds and destabilize the patriarchal system of power, and thus must be contained. The film closes with Miles' reportage of the bizarre events occurring in the small town of California. Though at first the group of fellow white men who surround him find him unstable, they ultimately restabilize that power in affirming his story; in other words, there is something to be feared – the white male body *is* being invaded.

[28]See the congressional record for "Homosexuals in Government, 1950" at http://writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/50s/gays-in-govt.html Accessed 5 May 2010.

[29] "However, in ridiculing the feminizing of gay men, Burroughs often reproduces the monstrous rhetoric of his homophobic culture" (Paton 59); "After years of psychoanalysis, Burroughs developed a bitter disdain for the psychiatric profession, but his letters often reproduce aspects of the medical discourse of the time" (Paton 58).

[30] Perhaps because of this tenuous and potentially unsettling relationship of identity to food (the potential recognition of the assemblages and flimsy fleshed borders of the body), food is also a subject around which discourses of both authenticity and purity consistently revolve in many present-day cultural forums of the United States. If food provokes, or demands, some acknowledgement of the body as comprised of various assemblages, with no definitive "in" and "out," the implied accompanying acknowledgement of bodily vulnerability may, in part, produce such longings for authenticity or purity in food (precisely because it is the object that "most visibly demonstrates" such vulnerability). Thus, with the feelings of disempowerment that may arise in this recognition of bodily vulnerability and assemblage, the political resolution and commitment lies in the attempt at reconciling the body *through* food; and such "unification" lies again in the power of the consumer (purchaser) and consumer (eater), and still relies on the disavowal and

invisibility of "other" assemblages. Marilyn Halter argues that corporate entrepreneurs have shifted from an assimilationist model, dominating for a large portion of the twentieth-century, to a "multicultural" model of marketing in terms of "ethnicity." She argues that markets have expanded to researching segmented consumer areas, and that in doing so, cultivate feelings of unity, nostalgia, authenticity, and community that can be purchased through the purchase of products; in such, she focuses particularly on food products that can grant consumers such identity. She states that, "although the impetus to reclaim roots often stems from disdain for commercial interests, paradoxically, consumers look to the marketplace to revive and reidentify with ethnic values" (13). She also notes that the term "authentic" has become a more marketable one in a society that aims to successfully market its own "multiculturalism." She notes that postmodernity promulgates a search for supposedly untouched culture, and that this converges with the desire for food affiliated rhetorically with the "authentic." Halter also notes that there is a sense of permanence in certain types of consumer products, as they symbolize a kind of stability or purity. She writes that, "marketing experts have predicted a growing desire among the prosperous middle class for products that could suggest more permanence or stability in their lives. [Warren] Belasco cites both oak furniture and ethnic foods as examples of consumer goods that convey a sense of continuity and rootedness" (4). The longing for the stable and sturdy (oak furniture), the authentic and traditional ("authentic ethnic" foods) are marketable desires precisely because they promise a kind of rootedness and pure origin, much akin to the supposed sturdiness of the "prewar apartment." Although a different kind of "purity," or "authenticity," this also resonates with the conventional approach to genetically-modified foods and the rhetoric of corruption and infiltration that surrounds the production (and consumption) of such foods.

[31] In a reading of "Capitalism, Family, and the Anus," from *Homosexual Desire*, Guy Hocquenghem states that, "sublimation is exercised on the anus as on no other organ, in the sense that the anus is made to progress from the lowest to the highest point: anality is the very movement of sublimation itself" (96). In Freudian terms, the anal becomes the representational space for all that is to be "repudiated and excluded from life" (qtd. Hocquenghem 112). *Naked Lunch* in effect desublimates the anus, and also desublimates the repressed abject materials affiliated with it.

[32] A particularly striking analysis of both the obscenity trial and the 1966 Massachusetts appeal of Boston's ban of the novel, see Frederick Whiting, "Monstrosity on Trial: The Case of *Naked Lunch*." Whiting suggests that both the obscenity trials, and the successful appeal of the book's ban in Boston, reveals the rules of iterability that governed the novel's reception.

[33] See Introduction.

[34] See Chapter 1.

[35] Sturken notes that it is particularly in times of experiencing disempowerment that the U.S. citizen-consumer is called on most avidly to fulfill the duties of this position: "Consumerism and paranoia are both responses to disempowerment and practices enabled by notions of innocence. They underlie the act of buying a Hummer in order to feel safe in one's neighborhood while one's country is at war across the globe for, among other things, an economy dependent on the overconsumption of oil. Commodity fetishism, which endows commodities with meaning that are disconnected from their

production and economic effects, enables the purchase of a Hummer to be seen as a solitary act of home defense and comfort, rather than as a politically inflected consumer decision that impacts foreign policy and the environment. The effect is circular: the fetishizing of the Hummer as a vehicle that provides individual comfort and safety helps to create the insecure environment that produces the desire to purchase the Hummer to begin with" (41). Sturken notes that in the wake of 9/11, the call to consume became the implicit and explicit equivalent of fulfilling one's patriotic duties in the "face of danger," and in the face of the "threat to our freedom" – and this was a call that was heralded not only by the media and politicians, but by the President (George W. Bush) of the United States. This call to return to shopping malls and get on airplanes was so commanded in order to assert one's patriotic fervor and in order to deny terrorists their power over Americans.

[36] There are (many) many books and articles that deal with the concept of the citizen as consumer. Just to name a few, see the following: Lizabeth Cohen, *A consumers' Republic: the Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003); Mark Bevir & Frank Trentmann, editors, *Governance, Consumers and Citizens: Agency and Resistance in Contemporary Politics* (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2007); Nestor Garcia Canclini (Trans. George Yudice*), Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflicts* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001). Also see Robert Bocock's *Consumption* (New York: Routledge, 1993) or *Consumer Society Reader*, edited by Douglas B. Holt and Juliet B. Schor (New York: The New Press, 2000). Additionally, a number of authors cited elsewhere in this project also deal with the citizen-consumer, including (among others) Sturken, Lavin, and Bauman.

[37] As I argue in the introductory chapter, no one (and no book) can be read "like a book," with the underlying assumptions of possible whole and integrated legibility. While books and bodies are not entirely legible, they remain so in the imaginary, and it is the extremity of the "notorious unreadable" state of *Naked Lunch* that makes it a particularly striking and useful example.

[38] In *Undoing Gender*, Butler writes of "instituting new modes of reality," and states that "possibility is not a luxury; it is as crucial as bread" (29).

[40] *Geek Love* was written in the 1980s, and the fear of contamination also certainly reflects the fear of AIDS and the multiple figures of the "freak" – homosexual and black bodies in particular – on which these fears were centered.

[41] Often the medical industry (and the public) construes intersexed infants as infants with deformities. Even the ISNA has recently begun to argue for the classification of intersex as a sexual development disorder (see Karakazis).

[42] See chapter 1 for a discussion of "maps of legibility."

[43] I would also challenge that the novel's mode is that of "realism." See Introduction.

[44] The violence in Turkey and the riots in Detroit are two of these examples.

[45] See Introduction, in discussion of what Kessler calls "lookism," as quoted in Karakazis.

[46] See previous note.

[47] Also see the following chapter's discussion of protection in the reading of *XXY*.

[48][48] Much of the popular media coverage of this issue tends to oppose surgery only on the grounds
that it may elicit a "failed" outcome – which means, in popular media rhetoric, that the child has turned out to desire being the "other" gender, and/or that the child has come to have non-heterosexual desires or relationships. This continues to be based on a the same binary that fosters surgical intervention in the first place.

[49] It would be important to consider what I have referred to as narratives of protection in this context. Ariel, like many white supremacists, claims that she is protecting whiteness and history. She disavows her own violence in doing so, and also premises this claim on notions of purity that, very clearly, are mythologies.

[50] Rushdy states that, "There were reports of copycat crimes within a week of Byrd's murder: in Louisiana, where three white men taunted a black man with racial epithets while trying to drag him alongside their car; and in Illinois, where three white boys assaulted a black teenager in almost exactly the same way. Three months later, New York City police officers and firefighters parodied Byrd's murder by imitating it in a Labor Day parade float. And while the trial was underway, a Washingtoon, C.C., radio announcer – the 'Greaseman' – responded to a clip from a song by soul singer Lauryn Hill by commening, 'No wonder people drag them behind trucks.' (He was fired the next day)" (75).

[51] I do not mean to underestimate the fear that Ariel feels toward her father, and the possible violences that might ensue with such a revelation, as he is incredibly racist and violent.

[52] This line from the film is repeated multiple times in regard to "Videodrome," and refers to the "video word made flesh" that both Max Renn and Bianca O'Blivion understand the "Videodrome" to be.

[53] According to Tim Lucas, "The culmination of all these biomechanical concepts is *Videodrome*'s Flesh TV. In some ways, the Flesh TV can be traced back to Cronenberg's influence by Beat novelist William S. Burroughs, who published a jaggedly impressionistic, avant-garde science fiction novel entitled *The Soft Machine* in 1961. In the script's early drafts, the Flesh TV was a far more mobile and ubiquitous presence, a biomechanical harbinger that appeared, menacingly and without warning, in Max's office, his bathroom, even on a street corner" (89). Cronenberg also directed the 1991 film *Naked Lunch*.

[54] See discussion about *Naked Lunch* in connection to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of the "flesh of the world" discussed in Chapter 2.

[55] See *Videodrome: Studies in the Horror Film*

[56] Ibid.

[57] See note 4.

[58] Also cited in Chapter 2.

[59] Please see Chapter 2 for a further discussion of the abject.

[60] See Safko and Brake, p. 231.

[61] This also resonates with McLuhan's media theories, and the human machine interactions present (and reflecting McLuhan's theories) in *Videodrome*.

[62] See previous chapter.

References

Adelman, Robert M., Crowder, Kyle, Curtis White, Katherine J., and Stewart E. Tolnay. "Race, Gender, and Marriage: Destination Selection during the Great Migration" *Demography* 42.2 (May 2005): 215-241.

Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

______.*The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Asch, Adrienne. "Disability, Bioethics, and Human Rights" *Handbook of Disability Studies* eds. Gary L. Albrecht, Katherine D. Seelman, Michael Bury. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2001. 297-326.

Barnes, Steve. "National Briefing: Southwest: Texas: Grave Desecrated a Second Time" *New York Times*. 8 May 2004.

______. "National Briefing: Southwest: Texas: Teenagers Charged in Grave Desecration" *New York Times*. 12 May 2004.

Bauman, Zygmunt. *Consuming Life*. Malden: Polity Press, 2007.

Bell, Kevin. "The Embrace of Entropy: Ralph Ellison and the Freedom Principle of Jazz Invisible" *boundary 2* 30.2 (2003): 21-45.

Berlant, Lauren. "The Face of America and the State of Emergency" *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997. 175-220.

Braddock, David L. and Susan L. Parish. "An Institutional History of Disability" *Handbook of Disability Studies*. Eds. Gary L. Albrecht, Katherine D. Seelman, Michael Bury. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2001. 11-68.

Brown, Bill. "Reification, Reanimation, and the American Uncanny." *Critical Inquiry* 32.2 (Winter 2006): 175-207.

Burroughs, William S. *Naked Lunch: The Restored Text*. Eds. Barry Miles, James Grauerholz. Berkeley: Publishers Group West, 2003.

Butler, Judith. *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Chaleunphone, Nick. "Living Kallmann's Syndrome: Living my life with Kallmann's

Syndrome." 31 August 2008. http://kallmannssyndrome.wordpress.com/tag/xxy/ 29 December 2011.

Chaleunphone, Nick. "Re: Question about your blog." Email to the author. 6 February 2011. E-mail.

Cook, O.F. "Phenotypes, Genotypes, and Gens." *Science*, New Series, 35.904 (Apr. 26, 1912): 654-656.

Covino, Deborah Caslav. *Amending the Abject Body: Aesthetic Makeovers in Medicine and Culture*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2004.

Davis, Kathy. *Dubious Inequalities & Embodied Differences: Cultural Studies on Cosmetic Surgery*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003.

Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger.* New York: Routledge, 2002.

Dunn, Katherine. *Geek Love.* New York: Vintage Books, 1989.

Eburne, Jonathan Paul. "Trafficking in the Void: Burroughs, Kerouac, and the Consumption of Otherness" *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 43.1 (Spring 1997): 53-92.

Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man*. Second Vintage International Edition. New York: Random House, 1995.

______. *Shadow and Act*. New York: Vintage, 1995.

Ervin, Michael A. "Statistics, Maps, and Legibility: Negotiating Nationalism in Post-Revolutionary Mexico" *The Americas* 66.2 (October 2009): 155-179.

Eugenides, Jeffrey. *Middlesex*. New York: Picador, 2002.

eXistenZ. Dir. David Cronenberg. Perf. Jennifer Jason Leigh, Jude Law, and Ian Holm. Dimension Films, 1999.

Fausto-Sterling, Ann. "The Five Sexes." *Sexuality and Gender*. Eds. Christine L. Williams and Arlene Stein. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002. 468-473.

Ford, Douglas "Crossroads and Cross-Currents in *Invisible Man*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 45.4 (1999): 887-904.

Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. "Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Studies" *NWSA Journal* 14.3 (Fall 2002): 1-32.

Gilman, Sander. *Creating Beauty to Cure the Soul: Race and Psychology in the Shaping of*

Aesthetic Surgery. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998.

Ginsburg, Faye and Rayna Rapp. "Enabling Disability: Rewriting Kinship, Reimagining Citizenship" *Public Culture* 13.3 (2001): 533-556.

Grosz, Elizabeth. "Intolerable Ambiguity" *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body. Ed. Rosemarie Thomson*. New York: New York University Press, 1996.

Haiken, Elizabeth. *Venus Envy: A History of Cosmetic Surgery*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1999.

Halter, Marilyn. *Shopping for Identity: The Marketing of Ethnicity*. New York: Random House/Schocken, 2002.

Halberstam, Judith and Ira Livingston. *Posthuman Bodies.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.

Haraway, Donna. *The Haraway Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Harold, Christine and Kevin Michael DeLuca. "Behold the Corpse: Violent Images and the Case of Emmett Till." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 8.2 (2005): 263-286.

Hayles, N. Katherine. "Afterword: The Human in the Posthuman," *Cultural Critique* No. 53, Posthumanism (Winter 2003): 134-137.

Hayward, Eva. "More Lessons from a Starfish: Prefixial Flesh and Transspeciated Selves." *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 36.3/4 (Fall/Winter 2008): 64-85.

Hocquenghem, Guy. *Homosexual Desire.* Durham: Duke University Press, 1993.

Hotchkiss, Lia M. " 'Still in the Game': Cybertransformations of the 'New Flesh' in David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ*" *The Velvet Light Trap*. No. 52 (Fall 2003): 15-32.

"How Communists Operate: An Interview with J. Edgar Hoover" May 16, 2008 (Reprint) *U.S. News & World Report*. http://www.usnews.com/articles/news/national/2008/05/16/how-communists-operate-an-interview-with-j-edgar.html 15 June 2009.

Invasion of the Body Snatchers. DVD. Director Don Siegel. Republic Pictures. 1998. Original Release: 1956.

Irigaray, Luce. *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*. Trans. Mary Beth Mader. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999.

Jones, Amelia. Body Art: Performing the Subject. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.

"Joy Kringle." *Nip/Tuck*. By Ryan Murphy. FX. 13 Dec. 2005. Television.

Kaplan, E. Ann. *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film, and the Imperial Gaze*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Karkazis, Katrina. *Fixing Sex: Intersex, Medical Authority, and Lived Experience*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

Lavin, Chad. "The Year of Eating Politically" *Theory & Event* 12.2 (2009): http://muse.jhu.edu.libproxy.cc.stonybrook.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v012/12.2.lavin.html 19 August 2009.

Lester, Neal A. "Nappy Edges and Goldy Locks: African American Daughters and the Politics of Hair." *The Lion and the Unicorn* 24.2 (April 2000): 201-224.

Loewinsohn, Ron. "'Gentle Reader, I fain would spare you this, but my pen hath its will like the Ancient Mariner': Narrator(s) and Audience in William S. Burroughs's Naked Lunch." *Contemporary Literature* 39.4 (Winter 1998): 560-585.

Lucas, Tim. *Videodrome: Studies in the Horror Film*. Lakewood: Centipede Press, 2008.

"Madison Berg." *Nip/Tuck*. By Ryan Murphy. FX. 22 Nov. 2005. Television.

Mann, Katrina. " 'You're Next!': Postwar Hegemony Besieged in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1956)*" *Cinema Journal* 44.1 (Fall 2004): 49-68.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "Eye and Mind." *The Primacy of Perception*. Ed. James M. Edie. Trans.
Carleton Dallery. Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1964. 159-190.

______."The Intertwining – The Chiasm" *Visible and the Invisible*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1969.

Minh-Ha, Trinh T. *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge, 1991.

Mullen, Harryette. "Optic White: Blackness and the Production of Whiteness" *Diacritics* 24.2/3, Critical Crossings (Summer – Autumn 1994): 71-89.

Nakamura, Lisa. *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Oliver, Kelly. “The Look of Love.” *Hypatia* 16.3 (2001): 56-78.

Paton, Fiona “Monstrous Rhetoric: Naked Lunch, National Insecurity, and the Gothic Fifties.” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 52.1 (Spring 2010): 48-69.

Peña, Carolyn Thomas de la. “‘Bleaching the Ethiopian’: Desegregating Race and Technology through Early X-Ray Experiments.” *Technology and Culture* 47.1 (January 2006): 27-55.

Pernick, Martin S. 1996. *The Black Stork: Eugenics and the Death of “Defective” Babies in American Medicine and Motion Pictures Since 1915.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Pitts-Taylor, Victoria. *Surgery Junkies: Wellness and Pathology in Cosmetic Culture*. Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2007.

Rushdy, Ashraf. “Exquisite Corpse.” *Transition* 9.3 (2000): 70-77.

Safko, Lon and David K. Brake. *The Social Media Bible*. 2nd Edition. Hoboken: Wiley, 2009.

Savage, Michael. *Savage Nation*. August 14, 2008. http://mediamatters.org/research/200808180003. 19 July 2009.

Schilder, Paul. *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body: Studies in the Constructive Energies of the Psyche*. New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1950.

Schuyler, George S. *Black No More*. Modern Library Edition. New York: Random House, 1999.

Shaviro, Steven. “Two Lessons from Burroughs” *Posthuman Bodies.* Eds. Judith Halberstam, Ira Livingston. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.

Shostak, Debra. “ ‘Theory Uncompromised by Practicality’: Hybridity in Jeffrey Eugenides’ *Middlesex*” *Contemporary Literature* 49.3 (Fall 2008): 383-412.

Shull, George H. “‘Phenotype’ and ‘Clone’.” *Science*, New Series, 35.892 (Feb. 2, 1912): 182-183.

Smith, Shawn Michelle. “Photographing the ‘American Negro’: Nation, Race, and Photography at the Paris Exposition of 1900” *With Other Eyes: Looking at Race and Gender in Visual Culture.* Ed. Lisa Bloom. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999. 58-87.

Stryker, Susan and Nikki Sullivan. “King’s Member, Queen’s Body: Transsexual Surgery, Self-Demand Amputation and the Somatechnics of Sovereign Power.” *Somatechnics: Queering the Technologisation of the Body.* Eds. Nikki Sullivan and Samantha Murray. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2009.

Sturken, Marita. *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

Tallis, Raymond. *In Defense of Realism*. Winnipeg: First Bison Books, 1998.

Tehrani, Bijan. 2008. "An Interview with Lucía Puenzo" *Cinema Without Borders*. Location: www.cinemawithoutborders.com/news/127/ARTICLE/1477/2008-02-20.html Access Date: 10 December 2009. Pdf file location: www.filmmovement.com/downloads/press/XXY_FM_Press_Kit.pdf Access Date: 12 December 2009.

Trimmer, Joseph F. "The Grandfather's Riddle in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man.*" *Black American Literature Forum* 12.2 (Summer 1978): 46-50.

Videodrome. Dir. David Cronenberg. Perf. James Woods, Deborah Harry, and Sonja Smits. Universal, 1983. DVD.

Wegenstein, Bernadette. "Getting Under the Skin, or, How Faces Have Become Obsolete." *Configurations* 10.2 (2002): 221-259.

Whiting, Frederick. "Monstrosity on Trial: The Case of *Naked Lunch*" *Twentieth Century Literature* 52.2 (Summer 2006): 145-170.

"Xbox: Kinect." Microsoft Corporation. http://www.xbox.com/en-US/kinect. 10 February 2011.

XXY. Dir. Lucía Puenzo. Perf. Ricardo Darín, Valeria Bertuccelli, Inés Efron, Germán Palacios, Carolina Peleritti, and Martín Piroyansky. Film Movement, 2008. DVD.

Yancy, George. "Whiteness and the Return of the Black Body." *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, New Series, 19.4 (2005): 215-241.

Zizek, Slavoj. "Neighbors and Other Monsters: A Plea for Ethical Violence" *The Neighbor*: *Three Inquiries in Political Theology*. Slavoj Zizek, Eric L. Santer, and Kenneth Reinhard. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.