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Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier

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Editor

Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier

University of Cologne
English Department
Albertus-Magnus-Platz
D-50923 Köln/Cologne
Germany

Tel +49-(0)221-470 2284

Fax +49-(0)221-470 6725

email: gender-forum@uni-koeln.de

Editorial Office

Laura-Marie Schnitzler, MA

Sarah Youssef, MA

Christian Zeitz (General Assistant, Reviews)

Tel.: +49-(0)221-470 3030/3035

email: gender-forum@uni-koeln.de

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About

Gender forum is an online, peer reviewed academic journal dedicated to the discussion of gender issues. As an electronic journal, *gender forum* offers a free-of-charge platform for the discussion of gender-related topics in the fields of literary and cultural production, media and the arts as well as politics, the natural sciences, medicine, the law, religion and philosophy. Inaugurated by Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier in 2002, the quarterly issues of the journal have focused on a multitude of questions from different theoretical perspectives of feminist criticism, queer theory, and masculinity studies. *gender forum* also includes reviews and occasionally interviews, fictional pieces and poetry with a gender studies angle.

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Detailed Table Of Contents

Editorial	1
Hedwig Fraunhofer: Gender and the Abject in Satre	2
Martina Mittag: The Obscure Subject of Desire: Lucretia Borgia in Nineteenth-Century Literature	26
Fintan Walsh: The Erotics and Politics of Masochistic Self-Abjection in <i>Jackass</i>	41
Beauty Bragg (Review): Susan Gillman and Alys Eve Weinbaum, eds. <i>Next to the Color Line: Gender, Sexuality, and W.E.B. Du Bois</i>	63
Kyle Frackman (Review): Tina Campt: <i>Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender, and Memory in the Third Reich</i>	67
List of Contributors	70

Editorial

1 Focusing on nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature as well as contemporary film and TV-series, the contributions featured in **Gender Disgussed: Gender and the Abject** employ Kristeva's concept of abjection and the abject in order to analyze the gender politics and rhetorics of the texts with which they engage.

2 In a reading of selected essays and plays by Jean-Paul Sartre, Hedwig Fraunhofer's "Gender and the Abject in Sartre" illustrates the extent to which Sartre's othering of fascism and his patriarchal — misogynist and homophobic — rhetoric partake in the same dualistic ontology as fascism itself. By studying these texts against the backdrop of Theweleit's theorization of fascism and patriarchal systems and Kristeva's concept of abjection, Fraunhofer illustrates how Sartre's works reveal a fear of abjection, understood as a blurring of boundaries and a "contamination of the center," common to both fascism and patriarchal systems.

3 In "The Obscure Subject of Desire: Lucretia Borgia in Nineteenth-Century Literature," Martina Mittag discusses literary representations of Lucretia Borgia in works by Heinrich Heine, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, and Victor Hugo. Mittag shows how in presenting the female poisoner as abject, a monstrous non-subject challenging male subjecthood and the symbolic order, these and similar works form part of a development which she terms the "virtualization of the abject," and which allowed the nineteenth-century readership of sensationalist literature to scrutinize the monstrous from the secure position of an uninvolved observer.

4 Fintan Walsh's "The Erotics and Politics of Masochistic Self-Abjection in *Jackass*" analyzes the nexus between masochistic acts of self-abjection and masculinity. Walsh argues that to celebrate the Jackass series and movies as a carnivalesque manifestation of low culture is to oversee its failure to critique dominant discourses. Thus, in that the show emphasizes the performers' ability to survive and control the threats posed by the staged acts of (self-)abjection, figurative castration and penetration, Jackass ultimately serves to reinforce heteronormative masculinity and the belief in the existence of a stable male identity.

5 **Gender Disgussed** is completed by reviews of recent publications by Susan Gillman and Alys Eve Weinbaum (eds.) and Tina Campt.

Gender and the Abject in Sartre

By Hedwig Fraunhofer, Georgia College & State University

Abstract:

This essay takes Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection as a starting-point to explore the relationship of the French nation to German fascism in the twentieth century — a relationship marked by an othering of fascism as foreign. To investigate this relationship, the essay specifically analyzes the discussion of fascism and the phobic abjection of the feminized (female or homosexual) Other in the early work of France's leading philosopher of the twentieth century, Jean-Paul Sartre. In contrast to Sartre's claims to an unequivocally antifascist ideological stance, his early work demonstrates the historical continuity between the modern European patriarchal tradition and fascism, and the dialectical implication even of antifascist philosophy and art in fascist thinking.

There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. (Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* 256)

1 In this essay I will take Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection as a starting-point to explore the relationship of the French nation to German fascism in the twentieth century — a relationship long marked by an othering of fascism as foreign or non-French. To investigate this relationship, I will specifically analyze the discussion of fascism and the phobic abjection of the feminized (female or homosexual) other in the early work of France's leading philosopher of the twentieth century, Jean-Paul Sartre. In that Sartre's work gives expression to the extreme fear of the feminine that, as Klaus Theweleit has argued, is at the basis not only of patriarchal society in general, but also of its extreme manifestation, fascism, it can serve as an example of the dialectical implication even of antifascist critiques in fascist thinking.

2 As Kristeva has pointed out in *Powers of Horror*, the continually endangered boundary between the inside and the (ultimately illusory) outside of a given symbolic system — such as, for instance, the nation — can only be maintained through a process of othering. Kristeva posits that abjection occurs when the rules of classification peculiar to a certain symbolic system cannot be maintained — that is, when "leakage" occurs. The binary structure of patriarchal society, the basic separation of (masculinized) inside/center and (feminized) outside/margin, cannot be kept intact. Abjection is a blurring of boundaries, a contamination of the "proper" center by the outside. The abject is both the zone where contamination occurs and the contaminating matter itself:

It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. (Kristeva 4)

The transgression of established separations and the impossibility of keeping these strict separations intact produce what Kristeva calls the "abject." Abjection is thus the mechanism by means of which patriarchal society, in the interest of establishing a clear inside/outside division, constructs the "feminine" as its other — as everything that threatens that distinction.

3 Well-known scholars of fascism such as Klaus Theweleit have argued that the attempt to establish strict classificatory boundaries and the abjection of alterity are at the heart not only of patriarchal societies, but to a heightened degree also of fascist patriarchal societies. Both Theweleit's exploration of the proto-fascist male psychic constitution in his classic work, *Männerfantasien* (*Male Fantasies*), and Kristeva's analysis of fascism in *Powers of Horror* center on the fear of the invasion by the feminized other. My Kristevan analysis of the rhetoric of alterity in Sartre's drama *Les mouches*, his philosophical treatise *L'être et le néant*, and other early texts, reveals a patriarchal language marked by the fear of contamination and points to the continuities between Sartre's patriarchal thinking and what Theweleit has theorized as the extreme manifestation of patriarchal society, namely fascism.

4 I would like to emphasize clearly here that I am not claiming that Sartre was a fascist. Rather I aim to point to the problematic nature of an "othering" of fascism. Such an "othering" has marked both Sartre's early work and — until quite recently — France's official stance towards its role in WWII. While France's reassessment of its war-time responsibility started in the 1960s, I argue (in response to the American historian Robert Paxton's different assessment quoted below) that there was a long way to go from the early questions often asked by a younger generation and the public acknowledgments by the French government and other institutions that the second half of the 1990s saw.

5 It was Theodor Adorno who, in his *Negative Dialectics*, insisted on the inescapability of dialectical contradiction, on the 'remainder' inevitably excluded in all conceptual identity. Adorno is interested in the part of the object that is not included in the identifiable thought, in the specificity, the concrete and individual, that is covered up by generalizing concepts. Conceptual thinking, in other words, does not readily acknowledge the multi-valence of social experience. I would argue that this insight also applies to the concept "fascism." Neil Levi and Michael Rothberg cite Adorno's famous and equally misunderstood statement that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (12). They explain that "[w]hat initially concerned Adorno [. . .] was less the impropriety of any artistic response to the Holocaust than how culture in general and poetry in particular failed to recognize their own implication in the 'sinister' forces of total social integration that made the barbarism of Auschwitz possible in the first

place" (12). I argue that Sartre's work as well, while claiming fascism as its absolute other, is also implicated in its structures.

6 My essay thus explores the complicated relationship between Sartre's celebrated antifascist art and philosophy and fascism. Although I do not intend to minimize in any way the atrocities committed under German fascism, my argument also aims to establish the continuities between Western modernity, including French cultural discourse, and the catastrophe that was early-twentieth century fascism.

7 Similar to the *Historikerstreit* (Historians' Debate) about the uniquely German nature of the Holocaust, a debate that German intellectuals have engaged in with varying degrees of virulence since 1986 and that was stirred up again in 1996 by Daniel Goldhagen's controversial book, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, France's and French citizens' relationship to Nazism and the German occupation of France during WWII have been the subjects of a recurring debate. The trials of Klaus Barbie, René Bousquet and Paul Touvier, the 1997/8 trial of Maurice Papon in Bordeaux, and the revelations about François Mitterand's questionable past again brought up the issue of the complicity of the Vichy Regime in Nazi war crimes. Former French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin took the Papon trial as an occasion to proclaim that concerning the period of Nazi occupation, "il n'y a pas de culpabilité de la France parce que [. . .] Vichy était la négation de la France et en tout cas la négation de la République" (Montvalon 8).¹

8 In spite of such proclamations denying any French complicity, the American historian Robert Paxton wrote in 1999 that "the often expressed American view that the French won't confront the dark side of their response to Nazi occupation has been false for thirty years. Ever since students began challenging their elders' reticence in 1968, France has undergone binges of self-scrutiny, whose feverish and repetitive character led Henry Rousso to give his book on history and memory the title 'The Vichy Syndrome'" ("The Trial of Maurice Papon" 32). Indeed, for some years now, France has been engaged in what Caroline Wiedmer calls a spectacular reassessment of its past, and specifically of its "uniquely ambiguous relationship to Nazi Germany" (3).

9 It is often argued that Sartre embodies the twentieth century better than anyone. In 2000, the French philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy published a study of the twentieth century entitled *Le siècle de Sartre*. I will posit that Sartre's work specifically highlights the ambiguities inherent, in the twentieth century, in the tensions between fascism and antifascism. Notwithstanding Sartre's role in the intellectual Résistance and his reputation as

¹ Jospin's affirmation was very favorably received in the National Assembly (as well as by the RPR's Jean-Louis Debré, showing that this assessment transcended party lines).

an antifascist writer and activist, a feminist and psychoanalytical examination of Sartre's early texts clearly points to the limits of this antifascism. In this essay I will not discuss in more depth the compromises Sartre made to get his work published during the occupation years — his articles in the collaborationist cultural review *Comœdia*; his publishing with Gallimard, which had been "dejewed" (*désenjuivé*) by the *liste Otto*; the public performance of his plays in occupied Paris, or other tacit accommodations with state antisemitism. In that respect as well, Sartre is more or less typical of what Omer Bartov calls "the moral confusion and the depth of accommodation that characterized the French intelligentsia in the first years of the Occupation" (65-66).

10 In my textual analysis of the rhetoric of Sartre's work, I will instead start my investigation with a brief exploration of Sartre's "Qu'est-ce qu'un collaborateur?" before embarking on a detailed examination of Sartre's famous drama *Les mouches*, a play first performed in Paris in 1943 under German occupation (1940-44). Whereas Sartre repeatedly emphasized the antifascist intentions of *Les mouches*, and whereas David Carroll, in his excellent study *French Literary Fascism*, counts Sartre, together with Adorno, as one of the "important antifascist theorists" (12), my analysis of the rhetoric of alterity in *Les mouches* and other early texts identifies the blind spots of Sartre's anti-fascism, revealing a language that is deeply patriarchal.

11 In his standard work on German fascism, *Männerfantasien*, Theweleit examined early-twentieth century European fascism as the extreme manifestation of the pervasive, constitutive fear of alterity in patriarchal society. Fascism is thus not external to Western society, but a logical extension and continuation of its fundamental, constitutive traits. The present essay supports this argument of continuity by pointing to the similarities between Sartre's language and the proto-fascist texts studied in *Männerfantasien*. Theweleit not only analyzed the psychic constitution of proto-fascist men, but repeatedly also emphasized *the dialectical implication of antifascist critiques in fascist thinking*.

Fascism as the Absolute Other

12 Similar to Jospin's statement quoted at the beginning of this essay, Sartre's "Qu'est-ce qu'un collaborateur" (1945), although published more than fifty years earlier, asserted that collaborators with the German occupation force had no real links to contemporary France (48): "soutenu par des armées étrangères, il [le collaborateur] ne pouvait être que l'agent de l'étranger" (50). In a by now famous misspelling, Sartre wrote the French fascist writer Robert Brasillach's name with a z, thereby emphasizing Brasillach's ideological ties with Nazism and,

again, the "foreignness" of this association. As Russell Berman notes, "[t]his was perhaps no naive error but at least a significant lapsus if not a calculated effort to represent the collaborator as a traitor, as if the French intellectual could have greeted the Nazis only by surrendering his native identity and aiding an emphatically foreign power" (xi).

13 The assumption that fascism is categorically "other," i.e., historically and culturally different from French culture, pervades Sartre's essay. Historically, in addition to this perception of fascism as alien to Western modernity, two myths in particular still pervade our interpretation of fascism and modernity: that fascist cultural production was homogenous and artistically inferior, and that modern art heroically resisted totalitarian ideologies.² The problematic concerning the relationship between modern art and fascism, and between fascism and anti-fascism, is one of the main concerns of this essay.

14 Sartre's essay is one of the most celebrated expressions of an earlier generation that denied any native French involvement in fascism and established fascism as the absolute Other. Whereas Carroll equates fascism with "the ideology of masculine superiority radicalized or even absolutized" and "a symptom of a deep fear [. . .] and violent rejection of nonsubservient or nonidealized women" (148), this essay seeks to transcend the emphasis on the biological sexes as fixed categories of identity and specifically a stable concept of the biologically female that plagues not only Sartre's work³, but also Theweleit's somewhat essentialist study.

15 If the process of othering, the repudiation of alterity, is at the heart of fascism, the dichotomy that Sartre attempts to establish between himself and the fascist Other, and by implication between France and German Nazism, collapses. If, as Theweleit has argued, fascism is an extreme manifestation of what latently underlies patriarchal societies, forming their foundational discriminatory structure, France, like any patriarchal society, then bears the roots of fascism within it. The electoral successes in France of the *Front National*, whose politics consist mainly in "othering" immigrants and other (non-white) races, corroborate this point.

16 However, it is important not completely to conflate fascism, patriarchy, and othering. As Lynda Hart observes in *Fatal Women*, the formation of subjectivity is based on the process

² In this context Henry Rousso speaks of "the myth of resistancialism" (*Vichy* 20-21).

³ With regard to Sartre, Judith Butler writes: "Women are not only represented falsely within the Sartrian frame of signifying subject and signified Other, but the falsity of the signification points out the entire structure of representation as inadequate." Butler understands gender as "a *relation* among socially constituted subjects in specifiable contexts. This relational or contextual point of view suggests that what the person 'is,' and, indeed, what "gender 'is,' is always relative to the constructed relations in which it is determined. As a shifting and contextual phenomenon, gender does not denote a substantive being, but a relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific sets of relations" (*Trouble* 10).

of othering, on the establishment not only of an ego position different from the (m)other, but also on the differentiation from the "alien" within:

If the "I" is produced through the expulsion of waste products, this process can be understood as a kind of elemental "othering," a construction of subjectivity based on excluding or expelling the "alien" within. The body makes waste in order to constitute itself as autonomous, sovereign, pure. The formation of subjectivity is thus a process that occurs not between discrete subjects but rather through the concealment of differences that exist within the subject. (98)

17 What differentiates fascism, literary or other, from more "benign" othering as part of the formation of subjectivity or community identity is the former's totality.⁴ Although it is equally important not to conflate the blind spots of antifascist texts with fascism itself, Sartre's treatment of alterity does fit the description Carroll gives of the gender ideology and the literary fascism of the French writer Drieu la Rochelle:

Such an ideology is constituted by the project to establish both genders as distinct and totalizable identities, to make man as such or woman as such either an ideal type or the representative of absolute negativity, of a pathological deviation from and threat to the norm or ideal represented by the other. If this is so, no approach that accepts such distinctions and the hierarchies they impose, no matter which term is privileged or how vigorously the masculinist ideology of fascism is opposed, can effectively undermine the ultimate gender ideal of literary fascism: to be 'total.'" (169-170)

Sartre establishes a strict gender dichotomy and poses both female and male identity as stable and essential. Woman is represented as a negativized threat to the norm represented by man. It is the totality, the absoluteness, of the representation of gender in Sartre that is reminiscent of the patriarchy's extreme outgrowth in fascism.

Abjection

18 In "Qu'est-ce qu'un collaborateur," Sartre moreover discusses collaboration as an illness ("une maladie"; see above "contamination"), "un fait de désintégration" (46), an extreme danger exerted by the foreign Other and its collaborators resulting from the disintegration of the French nation. In Sartre's essay, collaborators are described as threatening the purity, the clean and proper nature of the symbolic inside with abject

⁴ Cf. Butler, "For a Careful Reading": "It might be clarifying [. . .] to consider that whereas every subject is formed through a process of differentiation, and that the process of becoming differentiated is a necessary condition of the formation of the 'I' as a bounded and distinct kind of being, that there are better and worse forms of differentiation, and that the worse kinds tend to abject and degrade those from whom the 'I' is distinguished [. . .]. That an 'I' is differentiated from another does not mean that the other must become structurally homologous to the 'I' in order to enter into community with that 'I.' At the level of political community, what is classed for is the difficult work of cultural translation in which difference is honored without (a) assimilating difference to identity or (b) making difference an unthinkable fetish of alterity" (139-40).

contamination, Kristevan excess ("déchet," 48, 49) and, according to Sartre, they therefore have to be ab-jected.

19 Kristeva's psychoanalytical essay establishes an analogy between the perceived threat to the body politic and the imagined threat to the organic body and the self traditionally associated with it. She theorizes the threat of ego dissolution, of disintegration, of a falling back into a pre-oedipal state of non-differentiation. Following the anthropologist Mary Douglas' influential work, *Purity and Danger*, it can be argued that our understanding of complex social formations and views of social order and cohesion take as their model our interpretations of the structure of living organisms. As Tina Campt has outlined, Douglas' "work theorizes how the perceived danger of bodily pollution and aspirations to purity and its maintenance symbolizes the relationship between parts of society and mirrors desires for hierarchy, symmetry and homogeneity in the larger social system" (no pag.). Within the cultural and historical context discussed in this essay (France and Germany during the 1940s), the symbolically constructed boundaries of the body politic of the nation are imagined and represented as analogous to (equally symbolically constructed) bodily boundaries. These boundaries are involved in the constitution not only of national, but also of racial (or rather raced/racialized) and gendered forms of identity (Aryans vs. non-Aryans, men vs. women). As we will see in the brief analysis of Sartre's homophobia that follows and my longer discussion of the gender ideology in Sartre's work, the national body politic itself is clearly gendered (as well as raced or racialized, although race is not the primary focus of this essay). In brief, the notion of bodily boundaries and the perceived consequences of their transgression and violation in social terms are at the heart of Kristeva's theory of abjection. The extreme fear of contamination of the *Volkskörper*, in its literal as well as figurative sense, is characteristic of literary and non-literary texts from the era of National Socialism. Although Sartre critiques exactly this fear of contamination (by the Jewish body) in *Réflexions sur la question juive* (40), the same fear is found in his "Qu'est-ce qu'un collaborateur?".

20 What is most threatening, of course (as the Lynda Hart quote cited above already showed), is that the Other is really first and foremost inside — inside the symbolic system and inside the ego — and that this threatening *inside* can only be "projected" outside.<fn>I am using the term "projection" in quotation marks, because, as Theweleit (94-95) points out, it is indeed problematic when used in reference to the subjects of his analysis, the protofascist Freikorps members.</fn> Sartre as well establishes a link between collaboration and the collaborator's "inner nature," which is latent but manifests itself under the right circumstances (43). Sartre's collaborators, in other words, were already subject to the disintegration of the

self before they succumbed to the integrative forces offered them by Nazism (which provided them with what Theweleit calls an "ego armour"). Sartre describes this inner nature as inherently traitorous. The repression he consequently advocates is clearly reflective of the simultaneous repression and controlled incitement of feminized libidinal drives in patriarchal society. As Theweleit has demonstrated, fascist thinking takes this fear of the (feminized) inner drives and the ensuing repression and controlled incitement to its most acute level. Whereas Sartre argues that the collaborator tries to kill off "the human" in himself ("anéantir l'humain en lui et chez les autres," 60), he (Sartre) does not seem to be aware that his own article, submitting to a rigidity and restrictiveness reminiscent of fascist texts, targets inner human nature and its disintegrative pull as the very source of the described problem (collaboration). Without elaborating further, Sartre advocates repressive laws that would keep what he describes as the feminized drives of democracy ("un ennemi que les sociétés démocratiques portent [. . .] en leur sein;" 60) under control: "il convient qu'on fasse enfin des lois restrictives: il ne doit pas avoir de liberté contre la liberté" (60). On the intrapsychic level, the mechanism — the repudiation of the Other — is the same for both the collaborator as described by Sartre, and for Sartre himself. This mechanism also finds expression in Sartre's dualistic and hegemonic language, when he consistently refers to the collaborator as an essential(ist) "il," who is then continuously — but, as I have shown, ultimately in vain — opposed to the "nous" of the article.

21 Reflecting patriarchal societies' feminization of the abject Other, the Sartre of "Qu'est-ce qu'un collaborateur?"⁵, in clearly misogynist and homophobic fashion, discusses collaborators with the German occupation force as weak, effeminate men, as women and/or as homosexuals, and as societal misfits ('les éléments marginaux,' 46; "les ratés," 47). The collaborator, according to Sartre, uses "les armes du faible, de la femme," i.e., "la ruse, l'astuce [. . .] le charme et la séduction" (58). As we can see from the syntactic juxtaposition of "femininité" and "haine de l'homme" in the essay (60), the target of the perceived threat posed by the feminine is man.

⁵ As Carroll (152) points out, "Sartre was certainly not alone among political theorists of the left in characterizing the fascist as a 'failed male' or homosexual. Theodor Adorno, in a section of *Minima Moralia* [. . .] [w]ritten in 1944 and entitled 'Tough Baby,' made the sweeping claim that 'totalitarianism and homosexuality belong together.'" See also Andrew Hewitt's excellent chapter, "The Frankfurt School and the Political Pathology of Homosexuality," in his *Political Inversions*. Theweleit takes up — and for a long and disturbing time goes along with the conflation of homosexuality and fascism, in order eventually to prove it wrong.

Les mouches and La nausée

22 The repudiation of the feminized Other that characterizes Sartre's essay "Qu'est-ce qu'un collaborateur" is also a trait of his drama *Les mouches*, written two years earlier. Since Theweleit examines the intense fear of the feminine as the central trait of both the patriarchal and fascist psychological constitutions, my investigation of Sartre's drama focuses on the representation of the female protagonist, Electra; but contrary to earlier, at times essentialist studies of Sartre's "sexism," I also want to look beyond anatomical sex or gender. As this essay will further show, existence, nature, the fluvial facticity of the *en-soi*, sexuality, maternal engulfment, and feminized abjection are what Sartre's characters fear, what causes their nausea and what — like Kristeva's abject — fascinates them at the same time. By the end of Sartre's play, the threatening feminized force represented by Electra has been contained, appropriated and absorbed by the male hero, Orestes. Whereas Oreste Pucciani asserts that "Sartre was perfectly aware of the dangers of dualism and protected himself against it" (153), I argue that in contrast to Hegel's work, Sartre's rigid dualistic ontology denies the possibility of a synthesis or mediation between the (masculinized) self and the (feminized) Other. Whereas Theweleit's protofascist subjects found their protective "ego armours" in military mass formations, Sartre establishes a rigid binary philosophical system to fend off the perceived threat posed by feminized abjection.

23 A juxtaposition of *Les mouches* with the protofascist texts analyzed in *Männerfantasien* is especially intriguing since Sartre himself repeatedly emphasized the political, antifascist implications of his modern Oresteia adaptation, and since the validation of *Les mouches* as "a work of political protest" (Pucciani 159) has gone largely unquestioned in Sartre scholarship.⁶ Following Sartre's essay "Paris sous l'Occupation," which describes the Vichy régime's cult of remorse, national defeat and humiliation, the attitude of the people of Argos, who live in fear and remorse, can indeed be read as a thematization and critique of the attitude of the French people during the Nazi occupation. As Ingrid Galster points out, Vichy propaganda spread the idea that the French defeat was a logical consequence of the sins committed by the French during the Third Republic (12). In this vein, the character of Jupiter can be interpreted as Hitler, and Aegisthus as the Vichy government or Pétain. In his Sartre biography, Ronald Hayman furthermore argues that Clytemnestra can be read as a collaborator: "The queen represents the docile conformism of occupied France: 'For fifteen years we have kept silent, and only our eyes betray us' (187). Hayman's reading makes Orestes and Electre appear as Resistance fighters. Like Orestes' liberation of Argos,

⁶ One notable exception is Gilbert Joseph's *Une si douce occupation*.

the *Résistance* was, "a movement not of revolution but of revolt. It had no intention of taking power after the war; its single goal was to liberate France from the occupying Nazi forces" (McCall 23). The critique of paternalistic authority structures in Sartre's play, finally, can be seen as a critique of Pétain's speeches proclaiming the renewal of France along the lines of a clerical and restorative paternalism (Kohut 158).

24 In contrast, or rather in addition, to the interpretations prevalent in criticism on Sartre of the surface text of *Les mouches* as a liberal, antipaternalistic and antifascist text, a reading of the subtext, of the "excess" (in Kristeva's sense) of Sartre's play, reveals a language that is not only profoundly patriarchal, but reminiscent of the proto-fascist texts examined by Theweleit. The dualistic role distribution between Electra and Orestes in Sartre's play reflects the binary structure of Western patriarchal thought, where, as feminist theorists such as Hélène Cixous (in the section "Sorties" of *La jeune née*) have pointed out, the devalued side of oppositions such as weakness/strength and nature/culture is associated with the feminine. In Sartre's play, women are again depicted as inefficient and impotent. In contrast to Jean Giraudoux' Oresteia adaptation, *Electre*, written six years earlier, Sartre's Electra is clearly weaker than her brother Orestes. At the beginning of the play, she declares herself too weak to deal with Jupiter, the representative of paternalism, on her own. She waits for Orestes, the male phallic hero ("avec sa grande épée," *Les mouches* 125), to reveal the hollowness of divine authority and to kill her hated mother and step-father. After Orestes has then declared his determination to kill his mother and Aegisthus, Electra accepts Orestes as her brother and acknowledges his male authority: "Oreste, tu es mon frère aîné et le chef de notre famille, prends-moi dans tes bras, protège-moi, car nous allons au-devant de très grandes souffrances" (*Les mouches* 182). Electra sketches the picture of a patriarchal family, in which authority is based on gender and age and entails the protection of the "weaker sex."

25 The same dualistic and hegemonic rhetoric also structures the rest of the play. In contrast to Orestes, who represents metaphysical freedom and authenticity, Electra is shown as ultimately still embroiled in negativized paternalistic authority structures. In spite of her initially very vocal and determined opposition to Jupiter, her latent entanglement in paternalistic conventions becomes manifest when, ravaged by remorse after the murder of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, she accepts Jupiter's interpretation of her act as that of a child who does not bear responsibility. By accepting this interpretation, Electra falls back into paternalistic — i.e. divine, royal and paternal — authority structures, the master-slave dichotomy, and the state of an object (in Sartre's terminology, the state of *en-soi*): "Au secours! Jupiter, *roi* des *Dieux* et des hommes, mon roi, prends-moi dans tes bras, emporte-

moi, protège-moi. Je suivrai ta loi, je serai *ton* esclave et ta chose, j'embrasserai tes pieds et tes genoux" (*Les mouches* 239; my emphases).

26 As Ninette Bailey and Stuart Zane Charmé have both demonstrated, this binary distribution or split between privileged virility and deprivileged/negativized femininity is representative of Sartre's work as a whole. It also structures his first major philosophical treatise, *L'être et le néant*, published in the same year as *Les mouches* (1943), in which Sartre establishes his famous distinction between *être-en-soi*, which stands for inanimate objects, non-human nature, whose being coincides with itself, and *être-pour-soi*, human consciousness.

27 *L'être et le néant* and *Les mouches* clearly complement each other. What separates and distances Orestes from (devalued, feminized) nature or pure existence is his consciousness, which includes his alienation from and dismissal of divine authority. Orestes's murder of his mother, a crime against nature, further reinforces his alienation from nature: "Etranger à moi-même, je sais. Hors nature, contre nature, sans excuse, sans autre recours qu'en moi." (*Les mouches* 235) What Jupiter offers in Sartre's play is a return to the *en-soi* of unconscious nature. He tries to persuade Orestes to leave Argos by illuminating a stone (177). Leaving Argos would deter Orestes from finding his human essence (consciousness) and instead lead him back to mere existence (*en-soi*), to the massiveness of an object in non-human nature, a stone. Contrary to Orestes, at the end of the play Electra chooses to return to the unreflective state of *en-soi*, the state in which the people of Argos find themselves throughout the play. The female protagonist, like many of the other female characters in Sartre's dramas⁷, comes to represent what Sartre (in *L'être et le néant*) criticizes as bad faith (*mauvaise foi*), dishonesty, self-deception.

28 In the section "Les conduites de mauvaise foi" of *L'être et le néant*, Sartre poses the question "Que doit être l'homme en son être, s'il doit pouvoir être de mauvaise foi?" When he starts to answer this question in the next paragraph, his first sentence reads: "Voici, par exemple, une femme [. . .]" (94). On the following page, he predictably concludes: "Nous dirons que cette femme est de mauvaise foi" (95). "Man," on the other hand, is associated with candor, sincerity, with the opposite of bad faith: "Si l'homme est ce qu'il est, la mauvaise foi est à tout jamais impossible et la franchise cesse d'être son idéal pour devenir son être" (98).

29 Another example Sartre gives of bad faith is a homosexual, also repeatedly referred to as "un pédéraste" (103-105). Sartre's homophobia becomes obvious in passages such as the

⁷ Cf. Léni in *Les séquestrés d'Altona*, Estelle or Inès in *Huis clos*, Jessica in *Les mains sales*, Lizzie in *La putain respectueuse* and Catherine in *Le diable et le bon dieu*.

following: "L'homosexuel reconnaît *ses fautes* [my emphasis], mais il lutte de toutes ses forces contre l'écrasante perspective que *ses erreurs* [my emphasis] lui constituent un destin" (104). With regard to "the homosexual," Sartre's appeal for sincerity is couched in the following terms: "*Péché* avoué est à moitié pardonné" (104; my emphasis). And he refers to the homosexual as "[le] coupable" (105), the guilty one.

30 At the end of *Les mouches*, Electra falls prey to bad faith. Like Daniel in *Le sursis* or the Autodidact and the bourgeois in *La nausée*, she accepts the calm and permanency of an object, delivered from freedom, responsibility and existential anxiety. She uses her submission to God (Jupiter) as an escape from the human condition.

31 The devaluation not only of women and homosexuals, but also of feminized inner and outer nature links Sartre's work to Western patriarchal ideology and ultimately as well to fascism as theorized in *Männerfantasien*. Since in this tradition feminized libidinal drives are perceived as threatening, *Les mouches* advocates an ideology of emotional restraint. Whereas Orestes, the male hero, thinks rationally and therefore does not come to repent what he has done, Electra is consumed by feelings of guilt, because her participation in the murder was — like Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon — an act of passion, of hatred. In *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, Sartre, giving expression to the patriarchal and specifically bourgeois distrust of libidinal drives, denigrates passion:

L'existentialiste ne croit pas à la puissance de la passion. Il ne pensera jamais qu'une belle passion est un torrent dévastateur qui conduit fatalement l'homme à certains actes, et qui, par conséquent, est une excuse. Il pense que l'homme est responsable de sa passion. (37-38)

Passion, according to Sartre, is an escape, an excuse. While Electra consequently cannot escape the plague of the city of Argos, namely, the flies, symbolizing guilt and repentance, Orestes does not feel bothered by them (209). In contrast to Electra's miserable fate at the end of the play, the last sentence of Act II has Orestes say: "Demain je parlerai à mon peuple" (210). Orestes is the new king of Argos, the new — male — authority.

32 As we have seen, it is above all women who are associated with unreflective nature and with animals in Sartre's play. Whereas Orestes senses his alienation from nature, Electra is depicted as still part of nature and metaphorically linked to animals.⁸ In their black mourning attire, the women of Argos as well resemble the flies of the play's title. The association between animals and (feminized) lack of consciousness also becomes clear when

⁸ She says to Orestes, for instance: "Tu étais mon frère, le chef de notre famille, tu devais me protéger; mais tu m'as plongée dans le sang, je suis rouge comme un boeuf écorché; toutes les mouches sont après moi, les voraces, et mon coeur est une ruche horrible" (*Les mouches* 280).

Aegisthus calls his subjects (represented as women), whom he keeps in a state of fear and does not want to know that they are free, "chiens" (*Les mouches* 165), dogs.

33 Establishing a link between feminized sexuality, violence, and animal imagery, Sartre uses the latter to thematize the threat posed by feminized and negativized libidinal drives ("inner nature"). In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva links the abject to animals:

The abject confronts us, on the one hand, with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of *animal*. Thus, by way of abjection, primitive societies have marked out a precise area of their culture in order to remove it from *the threatening world of animals or animalism, which were representative of sex and murder*. (12-13; my emphasis)

In his *Die Traumdeutung* (*The Interpretation of Dreams*), Freud interprets animals in dreams as the displacement of the repressed libido. Animal imagery marks the site where libidinal energy and violence meet.

34 In Sartre's play, the apathy of the people of Argos, who fail to warn the returning Agamemnon of the impending violence and danger to his life, is linked to "volupté" and "une femme en rut," a woman "in heat." In the same passage, Jupiter then refers to an old woman as an insect and a fish, as

cette vieille cloporte, là-bas, qui trotte de ses petites pattes noires, en rasant les murs; c'est un beau spécimen de cette faune noire et plate qui grouille dans les lézardes. Je bondis sur l'insecte, je le saisis et je vous le ramène [. . .]. Voilà ma pêche [. . .]. Voyez ces soubresauts de poisson au bout d'une ligne. (*Les mouches* 111)

The woman's "voluptuousness" and silence are held responsible for Agamemnon's death and thus ultimately for bringing the flies to Argos. With reference to the murder of Agamemnon, Jupiter says to the old woman: "Tu as rudement bien dû faire l'amour cette nuit-là" (*Les mouches* 112). This conflation of violence and sexuality is reminiscent of the texts examined by Theweleit, whose fascist subjects' only access to sexuality is through a sexualization of violence. Uncontrolled, unmastered, abject sexuality and nature are what Sartre's characters — like Theweleit's protofascist subjects — fear, what causes their nausea, and what — again like Kristeva's abject — at the same time exerts a deadly fascination over them.

35 Abjection, the fear of engulfment by what is only projected outward, namely the inner drives, the fear of border transgression and ensuing erasure by the feminine, is addressed in *Les mouches* as well as in other texts of Sartre's, such as *La nausée*. In *La nausée*, cities figure as protection from "wild nature," from the feared libidinal drives:

J'ai peur des villes. Mais il ne faut pas en sortir. Si on s'aventure trop loin, on rencontre le cercle de la Végétation. La Végétation a rampé pendant des kilomètres vers les villes. Elle attend. Quand la ville sera morte, la Végétation l'envahira, elle grimpera sur les pierres, elle les enserrera, les fouillera, les fera éclater de ses longues pinces

noires; elle aveuglera les trous et laissera pendre partout des pattes vertes. Il faut rester dans les villes, tant qu'elles sont vivantes, il ne faut pas pénétrer [!] seul sous cette grande chevelure qui est à leurs portes: il faut laisser onduler et craquer sans témoins. Dans les villes, si l'on sait s'arranger, choisir les heures où les bêtes digèrent ou dorment, dans leurs trous, derrière des amoncellements de détritiques organiques, on ne rencontre guère que des minéraux, les moins effrayants des existants. (*La nausée* 217-218)

The unpredictability of what escapes the laws of the symbolic, the threat of the feminine ("elle"), is also addressed in the following passage:

Cependant, la grande nature vague s'est glissée dans leur ville, elle s'est infiltrée, partout, dans leur maison, dans leurs bureaux, en eux-mêmes. Elle ne bouge pas, elle se tient tranquille et eux, ils sont en plein dedans, ils la respirent et ils ne la voient pas, ils s'imaginent qu'elle est dehors, à vingt lieues de la ville. Je la vois, moi, cette nature, je la vois [. . .]. Je sais que sa soumission est paresse, je sais qu'elle n'a pas de lois: ce qu'ils prennent pour sa constance [. . .]. Elle n'a que des habitudes et elle peut en changer demain. (*La nausée* 221)

36 The *patronne* of *La nausée*, who is — due to not only her skin color, but also her maternal traits — a "white woman" in Theweleit's sense, conjures up the fear of the devouring mother. Her scent, that of "a newborn child," can be interpreted as a Freudian displacement for the mother. Whereas this mother figure smothers the narrator, pressing him against her maternal breast, he rescues himself psychologically by "distractedly" evoking the image of another male figure and "intellectual" pursuits. The narrator's reaction to feminized sexuality expressed in metaphors of lower flora and fauna is a feeling of disgust and physiological sickness. The verb *vomir* not only denotes physiological disgust; vomiting also marks a border transgression, the transgression of the bodily boundary between inside and outside and thus, abjection.

J'ai dîné au Rendezvous des Cheminots. La patronne étant là, j'ai dû la baiser, mais c'était bien par politesse. Elle me dégoûte un peu, elle est trop blanche et puis elle sent le nouveau-né. Elle me serrait la tête contre sa poitrine dans un débordement de passion: elle croit bien faire. Pour moi, je grapillais distraitemment son sexe sous les couvertures; puis mon bras s'est engourdi. Je pensais à M. de Rollebon: après tout, qu'est-ce qui m'empêche d'écrire un roman sur sa vie? J'ai laissé aller mon bras le long du flanc de la patronne et j'ai vu soudain un petit jardin avec des arbres bas et larges d'où pendaient d'immenses feuilles couvertes de poils. Des fourmis couraient partout, des mille-pattes et des teignes. Il y avait des bêtes encore plus horribles: leurs corps étaient fait d'une tranche de pain grillé comme on en met en canapé sous les pigeons; elles marchaient de côté avec des pattes de crabe. Les larges feuilles étaient toutes noires de bêtes. Derrière des cactus et des figuiers de Barbarie, la Velléda du Jardin public désignait son sexe du doigt. "Ce jardin sent le vomi," criai-je. (*La nausée* 88-89)

As Kristeva explains, the expulsion of what is inside, nausea, is a protective mechanism necessary to the subject's ego formation.⁹ In the passage quoted above, vomiting abjects the threatening inner drives and protects the ego from dissolution, from being engulfed by the suffocating mother.

37 Matrophobia, the fear of the archaic mother, also finds its expression in *Les mouches*, where the feminized Erinyes are depicted as a perversion of maternal love and metaphorically linked to animals, fluids, floods and inundation. In Aeschylus' ancient version of the Oresteia, the Erinyes already represent Clytemnestra's spirit. In Sartre's adaption, the First Erinye, conjuring up images of the engulfing, devouring and suffocating mother, declares that she will roll on Orestes' and Electra's stomachs and chests "comme un torrent sur des cailloux" (*Les mouches* 213; my emphasis) and further states: "La haine m'inonde et me suffoque, elle monte dans mes seins comme du lait" (*Les mouches* 214; my emphasis). She then further predicts her penetration of Electra's body: "J'entrerai en toi comme le mâle en la femelle, car tu es mon épouse, et tu sentiras le poids de mon amour" (*Les mouches* 214). Similar to fluids, the Erinyes, who are (traditionally and also in Sartre) depicted as women, overstep and blur boundaries — including bodily boundaries and the boundaries between male and female sexuality — and are exponents of Kristeva's abject. Moreover, as in Aeschylus, the Erinyes are metaphorically associated with putrefaction and pus (*Les mouches* 216), a contamination of clean, proper matter with improper matter.

38 In *Les mouches*, the threat posed by abjection is thematized not only in the description of the Erinyes, but also in that of the title metaphor — the flies. The flies, which have an important symbolic function, are attracted by flesh/meat and are agents of contamination. The pedagogue who travels with Orestes calls the old women of Argos "[v]ieilles carnes" (*Les mouches* 104), literally "pieces of old, spoiled meat," establishing a metaphorical link between the flies, putrefaction, contamination, and feminized fluidity.¹⁰

39 The link between Electra, animals, and feminized abjection becomes even clearer when Aegisthus orders Electra to leave town. He declares that if she is still inside the city walls, i.e., the masculinized inside or center, the next day at dawn, she will be slaughtered

⁹ Cf. Kristeva: "Loathing an item of food, a piece of filth, waste, or dung. The spasms and vomiting that protect me. The repugnance, the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, and muck [. . .]. Food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection [. . .]. I experience a gagging sensation and, still farther down, spasms in the stomach, the belly [. . .] *nausea* makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. 'I' want none of that element, sign of their desire; 'I' do not want to listen, 'I' do not assimilate it, 'I' expel it. But since the food is not an 'other' for 'me,' who am only in their desire, I expel *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish myself [. . .]. [T]hat trifle turns me inside out, guts sprawling; it is thus that they see that 'I' am in the process of becoming an other at the expense of my own death. During that course in which 'I' become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit" (2-3).

¹⁰ Cf. also the images of rats and lepra (*Les mouches* 244).

"comme une brebis galeuse," like a mangy sheep (*Les mouches* 166). Electra, who, like a diseased animal, is threatening contamination, needs to be expelled from the center, abjected. When Electra's dance is interrupted by Jupiter, the people call Electra a seductress and a witch: "Nous n'avons rien fait, ça n'est pas notre faute, elle est venue, elle nous a séduits par ses paroles empoisonnées! A la rivière, la sorcière, à la rivière! Au bûcher!" (*Les mouches* 164-165). Hans-Peter Dürr analyzes the witch as a woman who continually crosses the boundary between inside and outside, culture and nature, civilization and wilderness (46).

40 By depicting feminized abjection as a negative threat, Sartre's play participates in the patriarchal process of othering described by Kristeva. There are only two instances in the play where abjection seems to be presented as a positive force: the Electra of the beginning of *Les mouches*, who is still representing Agamemnon's masculine claim until Orestes comes to replace her in that role; and finally Orestes, the male hero, who has recognized his existential freedom. As the discussion of the viscous and of sexual desire in *L'être et le néant* will show as well, Sartre's work gives expression to the extreme fear of abjection — ultimately, the fear of maternal engulfment and sexuality — that, as Theweleit has suggested, is at the basis of both patriarchal society and fascism.

41 By the end of *Les mouches*, the threatening force represented by Electra, the threat posed by abjection, has been contained and transferred to — not to say, absorbed by — the male hero. This *dénouement*, among other traits, marks Sartre's *Les mouches* as a product of patriarchal society and a masculinist play, which depicts *masculinized* violence and sexuality as positive. Orestes addresses his sister, who is identified with the feminized city. For Sartre any encounter with the feminized Other is a project of forceful appropriation, not to say rape.

Viens Electre, regarde notre ville. Elle est là, *rouge* sous le soleil, *bourdonnante d'hommes et de mouches*, dans l'engourdissement têtue d'un après-midi d'été; *elle me repousse* de tous ses murs, de tous ses toits, de toutes ses portes closes. *Et pourtant elle est à prendre*, je le sens depuis ce matin. *Et toi aussi, Electre, tu es à prendre. Je vous prendrai. Je deviendrai hache et je fendrai en deux ces murailles obstinées, j'ouvrirai le ventre de ces maisons bigotes*, elles exhaleront par leurs plaies béantes une odeur de mangeaille et d'encens; *je deviendrai cognée et je m'enfoncerai dans le coeur de cette ville comme la cognée dans le coeur d'un chêne.* (*Les mouches* 179; my emphasis)

Reinforcing the philosophical proximity of *Les mouches* and *L'être et le néant*, the theme of appropriation also gains particular insistence in Part Four of *L'être et le néant*.

L'être et le néant

42 The fundamental concepts of Sartre's analysis in *L'être et le néant*, namely *pour-soi*, *en-soi*, *pour-autrui*, and *en-soi-pour-soi* are based on Hegel (*Fürsich*, *Ansich*, *Für-*

Andere, Ansich-Fürsich).¹¹ It was Hegel who introduced — but, given the history of Western patriarchy, in no way invented — the master-slave dialectic, the dichotomy between "Herr" (master, lord) and "Knecht" (slave, servant, bondsman). He distinguishes between "two opposed shapes of consciousness": "one is the independent consciousness whose essential nature is to be for itself, the other is the dependent consciousness, whose essential nature is simply to love or to be for another: the former is lord, the other is bondsman" (115).

43 Contrary to Hegel, however, Sartre denies the possibility of a synthesis or mediation between the subject (*pour-soi*) and the object (*en-soi*). Although the goal of the for-itself's totalizing appropriation is the establishment of the in-itself-for-itself, although, according to Sartre, man's desire is to be simultaneously *en-soi* and *pour-soi* — self-sufficient like a thing, but endowed with the freedom human consciousness provides — , the totality of *en-soi-pour-soi*¹² is ultimately illusory. In Sartre's philosophy, the higher dialectical synthesis, which Christianity identifies with God and Hegel with Absolute Knowledge, remains an unachievable ideal. As Sartre's drama *Huis clos* with its famous proclamation "L'enfer c'est les autres" demonstrates, for Sartre, the basic relationship with others consists of conflict:

Pendant que je tente de me libérer de l'emprise d'autrui, autrui tente de se libérer de la mienne; pendant que je cherche à asservir autrui, autrui cherche à m'asservir. Il ne s'agit nullement ici de relations unilatérales avec un objet-en-soi, mais de rapports réciproques et mouvants [. . .]. Le conflit est le sens originel de l'être-pour-autrui (L'être 431).

44 The power struggle between the for-itself and the in-itself in Sartre's philosophy and dramatic oeuvre is a variation of the struggle for domination that characterizes both Western patriarchal thought and practice and fascism. Sartre critiques neither the *pour-soi*'s attempt to establish mastery nor the basic binary and oppositional structure of Western thought; instead, his work can itself be analyzed as a product of the Western logic of mastery and domination. The struggle for domination negates playful ambivalence, abjects it, and affirms dualistic structures.

45 In the subchapter "La Psychanalyse existentielle" of *L'être et le néant*, Sartre describes the threat posed to the *pour-soi* by the viscous, a clearly negativized, "hostile" and "horrible" state. Like Kristeva's abject, the slimy, despite its repulsive character, exerts a deadly, trap-like fascination and poses the threat of fusion, degradation, ego-dissolution (e.g. L'être 701),

¹¹ Ronald Aronson also points out that "*L'être et le Néant* bears the traces of [Heidegger's] *Being and Time* on virtually every page" (94). Contrary to Heidegger, Sartre stresses the primacy of the thing; the in-itself is prior to consciousness.

¹² Sartre's term is obviously a translation of Hegel's *An-und-für-sich*.

and engulfment by the (m)other. The physiological reaction to the viscous is "a sweetish sort of disgust" (Manser 12), nausea (e.g. *L'être* 404)

46 Like the abject, the slimy is essentially ambiguous, "[une] substance entre deux états" (*L'être* 699), a substance between solid and liquid matter. The encounter of for-itself and in-itself is an encounter between masculinized mind (liquid) and feminized and sexualized¹³ matter (solid). The ensuing matter, the viscous or slimy, as well is feminized in *L'être et le néant*: "c'est une activité molle, baveuse et féminine d'aspiration" (700), a soft, yielding, feminine sucking, or "[la] [r]évanche douceâtre et féminine [de l'En-soi]" (701); it is "comme l'étalement, le raplatissement des seins un peu mûrs d'une femme qui s'étend sur son dos" (699). (The "ripe" breasts of a woman are of course those of the threatening, engulfing mother.) Whereas the masculinized *pour-soi* attempts to absorb and possess the feminized *en-soi*, the slimy resists this project of assimilation and turns the tables on the for-itself, in turn appropriating it. The clear distinction between the in-itself and the for-itself, the clear delineation of classificatory boundaries, is thus impossible to maintain. Abjection sets in.

47 In this context, it is again interesting to compare the reaction to the viscous — which is ultimately the reaction to abjection and the threat of maternal engulfment and sexuality — to Sartre's description (also in *L'être et le néant*) of sexual desire, which is associated with fear, the fear of the erasure of the rational, conscious ego, and "une douceur lourde et pâteuse" (457). Sexual desire, due to the threat it poses to consciousness of being invaded, submerged by the fluvial facticity of the *en-soi* (*L'être* 457) (as opposed to the "dry" characteristics of hunger), has to be subdued, repressed.

48 As we have seen, in spite of the dualistic rigidity of Sartre's work, one part of the opposition actually represents the negativized and repressed part of the self, which has been pro- and ab-jected outward. The qualities of the slimy, for instance, can be read, in a manner reminiscent of Theweleit's analysis of the psychological constitution of the proto-fascist Freikorps members and their "projection" outward of feminized libidinal drives, as a projection outward of the negativized, and therefore repressed, internal qualities of the self. However, in contrast to a Hegelian recognition of the self in the other and an ensuing reconciliation, in Sartre's dualistic ontology, mutual influence or exchange, intersubjectivity in Jessica Benjamin's sense, does not take place: "Les subjectivités demeurent hors d'atteinte et radicalement séparés" (*L'être* 498). In *Huis clos*, Manser observes, "all three characters are in hell precisely because they are prevented by their own choices from establishing any proper relations with those around them" (98). The inability to form object relations, the fear of

¹³ Cf. again the animal imagery ("ses ventouses" [suction cups], "il [le visqueux] s'accroche comme une sangsue;" *L'être* 701).

social interpenetration and mixing, is also one of the dominant features of the fascist psychological constitution as analyzed by Theweleit.

49 The result of Sartre's fear of the other and of the antithetical rigidity that ensues from it, the result of the fight for the subject position at the expense of the other's reduction to an object, is isolation. The pattern of domination prevalent in patriarchal society "leaves the self encapsulated in a closed system" (J. Benjamin 67). For Sartre the problem does not consist in realizing human freedom in the world, but on defending it from the world, when he writes in *La nausée* for example:

Le voilà encore qui me regarde. Cette fois il va me parler, je me sens tout raide. Ce n'est pas de la sympathie qu'il y a entre nous: nous sommes pareils, voilà. Il est seul comme moi, mais plus enfoncé que moi dans la solitude. Il doit attendre sa Nausée ou quelque chose de ce genre. Il y a donc à présent des gens qui me *reconnaissent*, qui pensent, après m'avoir dévisagé: "Celui-là est des nôtres." Eh bien? Que veut-il? Il doit bien savoir que nous ne pouvons rien l'un pour l'autre. Les familles sont dans leurs maisons, au milieu de leurs souvenirs. Et nous voici, deux épaves sans mémoire. S'il se levait tout d'un coup, s'il m'adressait la parole, je sauterais en l'air. (97)

In Sartre, the subject's destiny is solitary, absolute freedom: "Autrui est par principe l'inaississable: il me fuit quand je le cherche et me possède quand je le fuis" (L'être 479). Human solidarity and identification with the other in Albert Camus' sense cannot be realized in Sartre's system of thought.

50 Here it becomes clear that the universal responsibility that Sartre advocates, "l'universalité de l'homme," (*L'Existentialisme* 70, 74) in fact only consists of a fending off of the others' threat to one's own subjectivity (the threat of engulfment by the Other), an absorption instead of others' subject positions, and an imposition of one's own choice on them: "Tout ce qui vaut pour moi vaut pour autrui" (L'être 431). In *Les mouches*, Orestes assimilates, appropriates Electra's, the Other's, freedom. His existentialist project of recovering himself is, ultimately, a project of absorbing the Other. Since human solidarity and "fraternity" are unachievable, Orestes remains free, but alone. At the end of the play, he again leaves Argos.

Conclusion

51 Contrary to Sartre's claims to an unequivocally antifascist ideological stance, his early work demonstrates the historical continuity between the modern European patriarchal tradition and fascism, and the dialectical implication even of antifascist philosophy and art in fascist thinking. As this article has aimed to demonstrate, Sartre's early work shows a gender ideology reminiscent of the proto-fascist texts analyzed in Theweleit's classic text on

fascism, *Männerfantasien*. Both the texts analyzed in Theweleit and Sartre's texts examined here are characterized by an extreme fear of the feminized, abject Other — a fear of (inner and outer) nature, sexuality, maternal engulfment and ego dissolution. Sartre establishes a rigid, dualistic philosophical system as a protective armor against the imagined threat of invasion or contamination posed by feminized abjection. Due to this phobic rigidity, Sartre's fictive characters as well as his philosophy betray an inability to form object relations already familiar from Theweleit's study. According to Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, this modern inability to establish non-instrumentalized interpersonal relations and the consequent perception of any libidinal desire as ultimate threat found its most radicalized expression in twentieth century European fascism. If, as Theweleit has argued, fascism is an extreme manifestation of what is latently always already present in the basic exclusionary and phobic structure of patriarchy, France — like any patriarchal society — bears the roots of fascism within it. The exploration of the work of one of France's most influential antifascist writers and leading intellectuals of the twentieth century confirms this assessment.

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The Obscure Subject of Desire: Lucretia Borgia in Nineteenth-Century

Literature

By Martina Mittag, University of Gießen, Germany

Abstract:

This article focuses on new representations of Lucretia in the second half of the nineteenth century. From the many existing versions, those of Bulwer-Lytton, Heinrich Heine and Victor Hugo reveal different contextualizations of gender while discussing the poisoner as non-subject, a poisoner whose desire corresponds to collective ideals while her methods reflect the dark side of that same configuration and at the same time comment on the secret workings of money and murder. Non-subjecthood here is what Kristeva's term of the abject points to, as it is produced by the same logic as the subject herself, but reveals that logic in its negatory rather than affirmative power. Whereas the abject can manifest itself in any form of "uninhabitable zone" (Butler 3) that challenges the borders of the self, the female poisoner is a more complicated phenomenon as she reaches out for the status of subject, claiming free will, autonomy and reason as her defining features.

The abject has only one quality of the object — that of being opposed to I. (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*)

This zone of uninhabitability will constitute the defining limit of the subject's domain [. . .], that site of dreaded identification against which [. . .] the domain of the subject will circumscribe its own claim to autonomy and life. (Butler, *Bodies That Matter*)

1 Among the norms and values that shaped the ideal nineteenth-century subject, domestic solidity, middle class respectability and concern for morality figure first and foremost. However, if we consider the many pitfalls this subject was subjected to at a time of rapid and massive technological change, urbanization, and industrialization, it is clear that the balance between right and wrong, good and evil, subject and Other was rather delicate at times. The way to money and property did not always follow moral and religious requirements; scientific discoveries shaped new methods of achieving collective goals — and new ways of doing so in secret at the same time. Where the virtues of the subject were redefined with more strictness than ever before, its shadowy Other began to haunt the collective unconscious in crime novels and magazines, in reports on bank fraud and murder scandals.

2 Rather than dealing with crime in the conventional sense — where the line between ideal subject and Other seems all too clear—, I will be concerned with the more secretive technique of poisoning in order to pursue a kind of non-subject that reaches out for subjecthood and negates it at the same time. I will use the Kristevan term of the abject in order to describe a figure whose formation reflects a) a gender economy that denies access to full subjecthood to women, b) a specific balance between surface and substance, seeming and

seeing, linked to this gender economy, and c) the edges of that economy linked to notions of the Other as much as the sublime or love. Legal offence is, from this perspective, framed by an emerging order of secrecy that renegotiates the lines between those who know and those who don't, whether on the basis of scientific knowledge, financial genius or psychological wisdom. Where poisoning draws on the secret workings of substances — and thus on scientific secrets —, its most frequent motive — bank fraud and legacy hunting — draw on the secret workings of money, which in the nineteenth century gain a new complexity especially with the spread of life insurances. At the same time the traditionally male figures of the detective, the toxicologist, and the reporter emerge on the scene to counterbalance this new configuration.

3 Within that context, the legendary star poisoner Lucretia Borgia — as myth rather than historical fact — will serve as a foil for reading the figure of the female poisoner, whose motive is money, power and respectability. The poisoner in that sense is never the common criminal and cruel barbarian we associate with murder, but an intelligent, overly civilized and often knowledgeable person, who seems to confirm rather than contradict collective ideals. As a woman she is also on the less powerful side, but in spite of her gendered position (she is rarely a scientist herself), she increases her power through knowledge, finding an ally in scientific advancements, which provide more and more elaborate means of destruction. Magazines and newspapers, from the nineteenth century onwards, collaborate with science in satisfying an ever-increasing thirst for knowledge, but they also represent a critical instance when science is abused for immoral purposes. Questions of guilt and innocence gain a public dimension hitherto unforeseen, and while the female reading public is growing steadily, categories of gender seem to become more central in public negotiations of subjecthood. If, like in the case of Lucretia, the murderer is female, a whole series of new questions enter the scene. Besides the traditional affiliation of women and poisoning and the fear of powerful women, or of the association of sexuality and death, the debate of several concrete poisoning scandals framed — and might have triggered — new representations of Lucretia in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹ From the many existing versions, those of Bulwer-Lytton,

¹ Female poisoners are central in nineteenth-century novels like Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Wilkie Collin's *Woman in White*, Hoffmann's *Fräulein von Scudery*, Chamisso's *Die Giftmischerin*, or Thackeray's *Catherine*. On Lucretia and the Borgia family see for example J.H. Stocqueler, *Lucretia Borgia: A Romance of History* (1844), Swinburne, *The Chronicle of Tebaldeo Tebaldei* (1861), F.E. Paget, *Lucretia; Or the Heroine of the Nineteenth Century* (1868), Felice Romani, *Lucretia Borgia: A Lyric Tragedy* (1839), Ferdinand Gregorovius, *Lucretia Borgia* (1904), Antonio de San Martin, *La Raza Impura - Lucrecia Borgia* (1889), W. Grothe, *Die Kinder des Papstes* (1867), Conrad Ferdinand Meyer, *Angela Borgia* (1891), Ludwig Scoper, *Lucrezia Borgia, oder: des Papstes Tochter* (1834), Richard Voss, *Unter den Borgia* (1897), apart from the versions of Hugo, Heine and Bulwer-Lytton discussed here. There will be more, of course, in the twentieth century, and it is only then that female authors pick up the theme on a massive scale.

Heinrich Heine and Victor Hugo reveal different contextualizations of gender while discussing the poisoner as non-subject, a poisoner whose desire corresponds to collective ideals while her methods reflect the dark side of that same configuration and at the same time comment on the secret workings of money and murder. Non-subjecthood here is what Kristeva's term of the abject points to, as it is produced by the same logic as the subject herself, but reveals that logic in its negatory rather than affirmative power. The abject is the hidden underside of the subject, it is, as Kristeva says, "opposed to 'I'" and in that quality resembles the object, which is always in some way subjected to something. Abjection in that sense is the rejection of "that which is not me" (Kristeva, *Powers* 2), the rejection by which "I" is made possible, through the exclusion of Not-I. Whereas the abject can manifest itself in any form of "uninhabitable zone" (Butler 3) that challenges the borders of the self, the female poisoner is a more complicated phenomenon as she reaches out for the status of subject, claiming free will, autonomy and reason as her defining features.

4 To begin with, a few words on the historical Lucretia Borgia, who entered history as the daughter of Pope Alexander VI: The originally Spanish family of the Borgias came to Italy in the late Renaissance, and became soon known for cold-blooded murder, bribery, and sexual orgies. Lucretia's son Giovanni was thought to be the result of incestuous relations with her father or brother. Like many others who stood in the way of the Borgias' political or economic aspirations, one of her husbands as well as several of her lovers died under mysterious circumstances, and considering the Borgias' traditional stratagems of swords, daggers, garrotting and poison, the identity of the murderer was never questioned. There is no historical evidence, though, that Lucretia participated actively in any of these murders: In spite of her reputation as husband-killing wife and master-poisoner she might not have killed a single person in her whole life. Nevertheless, history chose her as an icon in a long tradition of female poisoners, which is closely associated with Italy herself, and continued to have different repercussions in the following centuries.

5 In the nineteenth-century, representations of Lucretia were strongly influenced by a renewed interest in the poisoning business in general. A whole series of new poisons was discovered: Morphine, strychnine, brucine, quinine, conium, and nicotine are just some of items added to an already substantial list that included arsenic, antimony, mercury, and opium. Another important factor in this revival of interest is the birth of modern toxicology, triggered by the work of the Spanish scientist Orfila. He published his *Treatise on Poisons, Or General Toxicology* in 1814/15, and was soon consulted as a kind of court of last appeal where he decided whether somebody had been poisoned or not

6 While chemistry thus claimed a new kind of authority in the domain of law and justice, the media collaborated with science in that they provided the common reader with information he/she would otherwise not have been able to access. Needless to say that some of the information was inaccurate or mere speculation, and that the reader's desire was not always for mere knowledge. Murder trials were well documented in most European countries, and the reading public eagerly followed every detail, not only in newspapers, but also in magazines that included both fiction and fact, accounts of real murder cases and murder stories.<fn>The line between fact and fiction could be thin at times. Thus Dickens' short story "Hunted Down" is about two real murder cases that scandalized the public at the time.</fn> De Quincey comments on the voyeuristic inclinations, the addiction to scandal of his contemporaries, in his essay "On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts" (1827), pointing to the effects of "mixed horror and exultation," and the "sublime sort of magnetic contagion" (55) that murder scandals had on the public. Newspapers and journals then — further transformed by the advent of photography —, not only produced new ways of writing, but answered to newly emerging public expectations.

7 In his 1846 novel *Lucretia, Or, The Children of the Night*, Bulwer-Lytton uses the Lucretia-legend as the source of inspiration for his utterly British version of the Italian heroine. This is particularly interesting because Italy in general was — at least since the Renaissance — often used to represent anything England felt it was not, and the poisoner in particular stands in stark contrast to an English puritan ideal. A female poisoner for the Victorians is even more of a clash, as it figures as the Other of the Victorian angel in the house, or the Other of the conventional female biography as, for example, illustrated in Jane Austen's novels. More than that, the image of Lucretia seems to hold the hidden romantic spirit of the Englishman who, in Stocqueler's version of the legend two years earlier, falls in love with what is clearly quite un-English: "Italia! oh Italia! thou who hast/ The fatal gift of beauty, which became/ A funeral dower of present woes and past,/ Oh thy sweet brow is sorrow, plough'd by shame,/And annals graved in characters of flame" (2).

8 The main issue in Bulwer-Lytton's narrative is, of course, a poisoning scheme that covers well over 500 pages, and which is essentially motivated by economic interest: Lucretia wants to inherit her uncle's estate and money, and on the way, her first husband is murdered, the second poisoned, and the daughter of her half-sister nearly killed by poison as well. Varney, her consort, serves as the male subject needed for the confrontation with the world of money, and is actually taken from the real world: England had its most famous poisoning case with Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, who had killed most of his family by poison and inspired

not only Bulwer-Lytton, but also Dickens, and, most famously, Oscar Wilde's essay "Pen, Pencil, and Poison." What is striking about the real Wainewright, and what appears rather new in the nineteenth century, is that he was far from figuring as the traditional Other of society, and rather documents how the Other, the criminal can look pretty much like the Same: He was right in the center of civilized society, a friend of Charles Lamb's, a poet and painter, an art-critic and an antiquarian. But he was also, as Oscar Wilde stresses in his essay, "a subtle and secret poisoner almost without rivals in this or any age" (no pag.).

9 While Dickens puts Wainewright in the center of his short story "Hunted Down" (1859), which basically deals with a poisoning case revolving around life-insurance fraud, he remains a rather marginal figure in Bulwer-Lytton's novel, securing the link between the main figure and the complicated world of finances, which women presumably cannot master by themselves. Thus he leaves Lucretia free to construct her scheme with all its moral and aesthetic ambivalence. In that respect Bulwer-Lytton echoes Thomas de Quincey, who rejects poisoning as a dishonest, illegitimate, and therefore effeminate version of the art of murder. Correspondingly, Lucretia's French husband Dalibard comments on poisoning as the "saturnalia of the weak" (Bulwer-Lytton 214). But then he gives his argument a strange twist, one which recalls a curious version of the Burkean sublime, that mixture of utter pleasure and horror which seizes body and mind equally. Considering the historical context of the French revolution — which Burke had commented on —, it also forms part of the connection between a woman's descent into crime and the fear of a nation's collapse into political turmoil:

It is a mighty thing to feel in one's self that one is an army, — more than an army. What thousands and millions of men, with trumpet and banner, and under the sanction of glory, strive to do, — destroy a foe, — that, with little more than an effort of the will, with a drop, a grain, for all his arsenal, — one man can do. (Bulwer-Lytton 215)

Poison here turns into the agent of a sublimity that for Kant marks the edge of the subject, and that for Kristeva is linked to the abject — and a notion of the sublime which fuses Kant's metaphysical and Burke's psychological sublime, empowering challenge to the powers of the subject and utter loss of self:

As soon as I perceive it, as soon as I name it, the sublime triggers — it has always already triggered — a spree of perceptions and words that expand memory boundlessly. I then forget the point of departure and find myself removed to a secondary universe, set off from the one where "I" am — delight and loss. Not at all short of but always with and through perception and words, the sublime is something

added that expands us, overstrains us, and causes us to be both here as dejects, and there, as others and sparkling. (Kristeva, *Powers* 12)²

The sublime nature of poisoning in Bulwer-Lytton's novel extends to Dalibard, the speaker of these words, and to Lucretia as the listener:

There was a horrible enthusiasm about this reasoning devil as he spoke thus; his crest rose, his breast expanded. That animation which a noble thought gives to generous hearts, kindled in the face of the apologist for the darkest and basest of human crimes. Lucretia shuddered; but her gloomy imagination was spelled; there was an interest mingled with her terror. (Bulwer-Lytton 215)

Interest and terror: far more than in Dickens' strange fascination with the coolness of murderers, the nineteenth-century presents itself here in all its strange ambivalence: reason topples over and becomes its opposite — sheer violence and utter brutality. And there is a fascination about the latter that is definitely not founded in reason. While this ambivalence reaches far wider than our perspective allows for, the question of gender evoked in the situation appears interesting in itself. Like with the sublime, (male) subjecthood is challenged by a monstrous unfathomable femininity, which exceeds and negates it. Like (feminine) nature in Kant's account, the figure of the murderess threatens humanity at its core but — for the reader, of course — is kept at bay by her virtual nature. The space of the novel allows for the doubling gesture of being both self and Other characteristic of the Kantian as well as the Kristevan experience. Moreover, poisoning is evoked as a female tradition, especially in Italy, where, as Lucretia learns, seven hundred men died of a 'household epidemic' obviously initiated by husband-killing wives. Lucretia as poisoner and namesake of the legendary Lucretia Borgia is clearly part of that presumably female — aristocratic — tradition, but in spite of her central role in the novel, and as if such excess of female power needed a surplus of containment, she is depicted as a student and follower of Dalibard, the "master of the art," similar to the historical Lucretia who presumably followed her brother Cesare.

10 If we consider Bulwer-Lytton's novel from a gender point of view, so much is clear: It is the men who are the real artists, and in this respect Bulwer-Lytton echoes Wilde's celebration of the murderer as genius and his presentation of Cesare Borgia as master-poisoner:

Murderer as he was, poisoner, and fratricide, — did blood clog his intellect, or crime impoverish his genius? Was his verse less melodious, or his love of art less intense, or

² Cf. Kristeva's parallel between the abject and the sublime: the abject cannot be defined, it rather "lies there quite close, but it cannot be assimilated" (*Powers* 1). There is an almost Kantian effect of its negative quality: "Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A 'something' that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me" (Kristeva, *Powers* 2). On Kristeva's notion of the abject see Wahrig 2007.

his eloquence less pervasive, because he sought to remove every barrier, revenge every wrong, crush every foe? (459)

Bulwer-Lytton's gendering strategies are not entirely consistent, however, because Lucretia is also masculinized: she is attributed a "masculine and grasping mind" (469), which contradicts De Quincey's thesis of poisoning as feminine and positions it in a masculinized space between the Arts and the Sciences instead.

The reader will doubtless have observed the consummate art with which the poisoner had hitherto advanced upon her prey. The design conceived from afar, and executed with elaborate stealth, defied every chance of detection against which the ingenuity of practised villainy could guard. Grant even that the deadly drugs should betray the nature of the death they inflicted, that by some un conjectured secret in the science of chemistry the presence of those vegetable compounds, which had hitherto baffled every known and positive test in the posthumous examination of the most experienced surgeons, should be clearly ascertained, not one suspicion seemed likely to fall upon the ministrant of death. (Bulwer-Lytton 532)

It is obvious, that Lucretia's methods remain as secretive as the description of them, and it is only in a footnote on page 532 that we finally learn about the method that must have fascinated Bulwer-Lytton so much that he leaves the reader in the dark about it over more than 500 pages: all we knew before was that Lucretia would secretly go to Helen's chamber and somehow find a way to poison her slowly. Now we are told that she infused a colorless and tasteless liquid in Helen's medicine. Only if we bother to read the brief footnote we learn what this liquid is: "The celebrated acqua di Tufania was wholly without taste or color" ³ (532). Apart from evoking a whole tradition of female poisoning (and the male fear associated with it), Bulwer-Lytton here points to invisibility as a crucial aspect, the fact that the crime, the poison, or, as Varney calls it at some point "these pale alchemies" (545), are not traceable.

11 The invisibility of the substance is the more relevant as it is linked to the invisibility of women in public life, their absence as full subjects in contemporary society. Moreover, it underlines the feminization of murder by poison, as apparent in Bulwer-Lytton, or latently in

³ Tofania di Adamo, the famous seventeenth-century poisoner, after whom the substance was named, invented a kind of poison based on arsenic, but completely colourless and hard to detect even for the experts. She did use her invention on more than 600 people — at least this is what she confessed under torture —, and was strangled for her crimes in 1709. The poison she invented, however, continued to fascinate posterity and participated in a long tradition of female poisoning that included the famous Marquise de Brinvillier in seventeenth-century France, who entered nineteenth-century literature in E.T.A. Hoffman's *Fräulein von Scudery*, the German Anna Zwanziger, or the English Mary Blandy. In the mid-nineteenth century, while poison was gaining a new relevance on a more general scale with the murder scandals of Wainewright and Palmer, the French case of Marie Lafarge, who had poisoned her much-hated husband, was reported on widely in English newspapers. Even though there was as much evidence against as in favor of her, the English press joined the French in expressing general sympathy, but, apart from taking the case as a consequence of an ill-arranged marriage with a man who showed all traces of a barbarian, they presented it as a symptom of the evil French judicial system (see Hartmann).

Dickens in his comments on Wainewright, when he deplores the emergence of "a new race of poisoners."

12 If Bulwer-Lytton's *British Lucretia* seems inspired by both her famous namesake and the media scandals around mostly male poisoners, her main interest remains *money*, and thus a completely different concern from Victor Hugo's version of the story a decade earlier: Hugo's heroine is not about money but motherhood, — even though class or family are central factors here, too. In short, the play tells the "true story" of Lucretia and her beloved son Gennaro, who does not know about their family ties because he was brought up by a fisherman. The fisherman has just told him about his real mother, who started writing him letters, and he came to love her deeply without ever having met her in person. Now Lucretia, who cannot reveal her true identity, accidentally poisons her son and then tries to rescue him by handing him an antidote. He refuses to take it, as it would only save him, but not his friends, who were given the same poison. To take revenge he stabs her with a knife instead, and her last dramatic words before she dies are: "I am your mother"(103).

13 In Victor Hugo's romanticized version, then, there is an open conflict between the female poisoner and the idealized figure of the mother, two terms which appear incommensurable. Lucretia cannot be condemned wholesale, as she is situated in a corrupt judicial system, and like her son, she is a Borgia. There are several hints in the play that characterize the Borgia family as a family of devils, with the familiar associations of incest, murder and corruption: Borgia reads "orgia" (40) on a bench in front of the Palace, the settings are described as the "palace barbarigo" (passim) or the palace of sin, of murder, etc. Crime is thus not a matter of free will, but of family ties, and this is equally true for her son: When Gennaro considers murdering Lucretia, whom, at this point, he takes for his aunt, he ponders whether he would commit a crime: "Oh, my brain is confused," he says, "[. . .] and if I did commit a crime? My God, I am a Borgia" (Hugo 100; my translation).

14 Both Gennaro and Lucretia are located between intrinsic evil and victimhood of evil circumstances — where categories become confused, boundaries between good and evil, poison and antidote questioned. Both are at once self-obscuring subjects of murderous deeds, objects of desire, and morally abjected. Crime turns from action to identity, from a question of doing to a question of being: They are Borgias, so they must kill. While identity is essentially premodern and context-bound, the question of subjecthood is here intricately linked to the question of abjection and intensified by the association between motherhood and the monstrous. Where the subject would be guilty, the abject — as non-subject — is cursed. Poison here has infected the holy dyad between mother and son; the moment of terror

condensed in the four words "I am your mother" exceeds by far the monstrous maternal sin of poisoning, accidental or not. Against the inextricable couple of the sublime and the abject that was central to Bulwer-Lytton's story, Kristeva's earlier — and equally gendered — couple of semiotic and symbolic becomes interesting in reading Hugo's heroine.⁴ The obvious lack of language in Lucretia's minimal speech to her son reflects the semiotic as pre-verbal stage, the scene of murder as utter monstrosity in relation to the socio-symbolic contract, while the maternal appears as the threat of death and the compensation for that threat. It is thus no coincidence that portraits of Lucretia oscillate between the figures of the courtesan and the virgin Mary, corresponding to the dichotomy of whore and holy who are both situated outside the order of the subject (see illustrations 1 and 2). It is Hugo's Lucretia which comes closest to Kristeva's psychoanalytical account of the abject as well as her concern with the maternal as situated outside the symbolic. In Hugo's version, the (murderous) mother cannot speak (— the question is whether the Oedipal construction of subjectivity leaves much room for female subjectivity —), but for the son she is a continuous presence throughout the play⁵, until she finally appears in person — in order to kill and be killed.

16 The second aspect emphasized in Heine's reflections is the relation between society and science as it appears in the passionate reactions of the public to the trial of Marie Lafarge. Here Heine ironically comments that the public rather suspected poison in the heart of the toxicologist than in the corpse of the murdered husband, and that they accused the deceased of having unlawfully stolen an aristocratic Parisian woman and brought her into his barbarian surroundings. Both scientific and judicial arrogance are positioned in contrast to the passionate sympathy for Marie, who had been condemned to live next to a man whom she detested. Public opinion, as Heine describes it, is of the sort that there is no doubt that Marie Capelle is innocent, and that in her place, the famous toxicologist, dean of the medical faculty of Paris should be pilloried on the market place of Tulle.⁶

⁴ Cf. Burgin's reflections on Kristeva's notion of the abject as prior to the mirror stage between the subject and the object but also as the means by which "the subject is first impelled towards the possibility of constituting itself as such &— in an act of revulsion, of expulsion of that which can no longer be contained. Significantly, the first object of abjection is the pre-Oedipal mother — prefiguring that positioning of women in society" (36).

⁵ Cf. Kristeva: "The abject from which he does not cease separating is for him, in short, a land of oblivion that is constantly remembered. Once upon blotted out time the abject must have been a magnetized pole of covetousness" (*Powers* 8).

⁶ "[D]ann zweifelt man nicht länger, daß Marie Capelle unschuldig ist und an ihrer Statt der berühmte Toxologe, welcher Dekan der Medizinischen Fakultät von Paris, nämlich Herr Orfila, auf dem Marktplatz von Tulle an den Pranger gestellt werden sollte! Wer aus näherer Beobachtung die Umdriebe jenes eitlen Selbstsüchtlings nur einigermaßen kennt, ist in tiefster Seele überzeugt, daß ihm kein Mittel zu schlecht ist, wo er eine Gelegenheit findet, sich in seiner wissenschaftlichen Spezialität wichtig zu machen und überhaupt den Glanz seiner Berühmtheit zu fördern! In der Tat, dieser schlechte Sänger, der, wenn er in den Soireen von Paris seine schlechten Romanzen meckert, kein menschliches Ohr schont und jeden töten möchte, der ihn auslacht: er würde auch kein Bedenken tragen, ein Menschenleben zu opfern, wo es gälte, das versammelte Publikum glauben zu

17 Public opinion, as shaped by and reflected in newspaper and trial reports, for Heine is in itself subjected to poisoning, metaphorical, of course. What we are talking about is not just a concrete case of poisoning, but a structural phenomenon that affects the social order itself, poisons collective structures and positions women as abject beings.⁷ Against the fictional representations of Lucretia, abjection here is framed by science and the law, but no doubt virtual abjection had an impact on real life cases, which Heine is trying to highlight.

18 The three perspectives of Bulwer-Lytton, Hugo and Heine appear utterly different at first sight, and they do indeed comment on cultural differences between England, Germany and France in the nineteenth-century. What they share, however, is a subject-object-economy which is unthinkable without a third instance, the abject, in Kristeva's definition that which is "not me" (2), that which perturbs an identity, a system, an order. The three Lucretias are to a considerable extent classical subjects endowed with free will, reason and agency, regardless of whether they aim at money, motherhood or romantic marriage. At the same time, however, they are also subjected to uncontrollable drives and to circumstances that determine their actions, circumstances framed by class, family, gender. Here they are neither subjects nor objects, utterly evil or utterly innocent, precisely because these categories do not hold if the system itself turns evil or confuses the categories. As subjects, all the Lucretias can't help it, they need to poison, and in so far they are abjects in the Kristevan sense "of being opposed to 'I'"(9). The loss of self as subject implied here appears most fully where the abject merges with the sublime in the case of Bulwer-Lytton's Lucretia. Her "interest mingled with her terror" recall a Burkean sublime as a physical and a psychological phenomenon. The fact of its appearance at the edge of the subject, in a zone of abjection, triggers the experience of being one's self's Other that motivates so much nineteenth-century literature, whether in Jekyll and Hyde, de Quincey, Swinburne, or countless others. Lucretia's Jekyll-Hyde moment is closely associated with the idea of "being an army," a megalomaniac fantasy triggered by the poisonous substance, which thus turns into an agent of the superhuman. However, the same phenomenon of surplus that triggers the sublime sensation, is also the ground for the loss of the subject and the birth of the abject. In other words: the abject is produced by the same logic

machen, niemand sei so geschickt wie er, jedes verborgene Gift an den Tag zu bringen! Die öffentliche Meinung geht dahin, daß im Leichnam des Lafarge gar kein Gift, desto mehr hingegen im Herzen des Herrn Orfila vorhanden war"(Art. XX).

⁷ Thus, in a different context, Heine describes how a particular slow poison, an aqua tofana, affects and destroys society: "Wir haben keinen Krieg, aber der Frieden richtet uns hin, und gehen wir nicht plötzlich zugrunde durch einen brutalen Zufall, so sterben wir doch allmählich an einem gewissen schleichenden Gift, an einer Aquatofana, welche uns in den Kelch des Lebens geträufelt worden, der Himmel weiß, von welcher Hand" (Art. LIII).

that defines the subject, but it is carried beyond its limits — to the point where it negates itself.⁸

19 The medium of abjection, the poisonous substance, is of course not poisonous by definition — its deadliness is a matter of secrecy as well as of quantity. The curing or damaging effect of the substance depends on whether it is recognized for what it is, and how much is taken in.⁹ Both quantity and secrecy are linked to epistemological questions, scientific advancement and the dominant politics of knowledge, as Dickens well knew when he pleaded for public knowledge of poisons (1856). In abjection, however, — and this exceeds the secrecy-transparency issue — the dark properties of the substance¹⁰ are complemented by the dark properties of its user, both negating and transgressing modern definitions of the subject. Insofar as Hugo's poisoners, for example, cannot help poisoning, they are not subjects anymore but subjected to drives outside their control. At the same time they are subjects pushing reason, autonomy, control, and free will — after all the determining factors of modern subjecthood — to their limits and beyond. Beyond into the dark zones of the unknown, beyond into the abyss, beyond into heaven. Whether diabolical or divine is not relevant within that particular economy of a subject in search for the secretive obscurity of the impossible — even if that means obscuring its own self.¹¹

20 Interestingly, none of the rewritings of the female poisoner were authored by women; it is male writers who translate a female challenge to the symbolic order into nineteenth-century terms. Next to the economy of the sublime, an emerging media configuration that builds on sensations to feed a growing reading public triggers a development which I would like to call the "virtualization of the abject." The desire for scandal is reflected in the sensationalism of the day, a taste for an observation of the monstrous from a position of security that is so characteristic for nineteenth-century readers. With the public enactment of punishment clearly confined since the 1860s — public executions were abolished in 1868 —, it seems that a collective desire was translated into the realm of print: Right next to the Victorian newspaper the sensation novel satisfied that desire, presenting as much rape,

⁸ Kristeva also points to the relation between the abject and the sublime in her opposition of the symptom and sublimation. I quote the original: "La sublimation [. . .] n'est rien d'autre que la possibilité de nommer le pré-nominal, le pre-objectal, qui ne sont en fait qu'un trans-nominal, un trans-objectal. Dans le symptôme, l'abject m'envahit, je le deviens. Par la sublimation, je le tiens. L'abject est bordé de sublime. Ce n'est pas le même moment du parcours, mais c'est le même sujet et le même discours qui les font exister" (*L'Horreur* 19).

⁹ The German word *Gift* still implies the English *gift*, but it has turned into a deadly gift.

¹⁰ Poisons might cause death, but they cannot cause the kind of death which infects life that the abject points to.

¹¹ As one French author describes it: "Now hell is heaven in depth. The words 'diabolical' or 'divine', applied to the intensity of feeling, express the same, that is feeling bordering the supernatural" (Barbey d'Aurevilly, *Bonheur dans le crime*). For all the criticism that this subject economy has attracted, this strange affinity between the abject and the sublime is one more zone that needs careful consideration, as it marks the limit between humanity and apocalypse — recently for example in Stockhausen's comments on 9/11.

suicide, and murder as the reader could wish for. To this day, it remains a controversial question whether literature — or, film, if we look at our own century — serves as an educational instance or a compensatory realm, an Other of reality where the reader can live out aggressive or violent instincts without damage to society — or, and that seems to be a more common argument nowadays, if that same reader is taught aggression, murder and violence. Does the virtual abject please because it is a fiction (as Dr. Johnson had it), or does the intensity of feeling grow in a Burkean manner, "the nearer it approaches reality, and the further it removes us from all ideas of fiction, the more perfect is its power" (Dallas 293)? The question remains especially interesting, where virtualization seems to hold an uncontrollable feminine at bay, a feminine threat to subjecthood that, as Kristeva has shown, is so close to the sublime.

21 In any case, the attention drawn by the abject is well-documented in mid-Victorian newspapers and it is perhaps no coincidence that the disappearance of public bodily punishment is balanced by the more virtual, but nonetheless real experience of public scandal. The emergence of sensation novels and crime fiction responds to this new cultural configuration, which includes transformations within the discourses of law, science and technology. While Dickens fully believed in the educational function of books and magazines — those who read will know how to avoid certain pitfalls — other authors articulate warnings of quite a different potential of literature. They are those who deplore the desire for scandal of their contemporaries, who complain about sensation novels as confusions of moral categories, as "hybrid combinations of the mean and the noble" (Thackeray 193). One such author was William Thackeray, who in 1839 published another story of a murderess with the simple title "Catherine: A Story." It is built on the real life story of Catherine Hayes who was burned at Tyburn in 1726 for poisoning her husband and her lover with Laudanum. In contrast to the sublimation of abjection inherent in Bulwer-Lytton or Hugo, whose Lucretias are after all elite figures, poisoning here moves from the upper classes to the masses. And other than the sensation writers Thackeray makes it clear that there is a moral purpose in writing literature, and here he claims the authority of Truth: his intent is to "counteract the injurious influences of some popular fictions of that day, which made heroes of highwaymen and burglars, and created a false sympathy for the vicious and criminal." Significantly, the sensationalist writer for Thackeray turns into poisoner himself, using literature as his drug: "The public was, in our nation, dosed and poisoned by the prevailing literary practice, and it was necessary to administer some medicine that would produce a wholesome nausea and afterwards bring about a more healthy habit" (193). Of course, none of the Lucretia stories discussed here

would fit into Thackeray's concept. By nature (and nineteenth-century culture) she remains a figure of the abject, whose "sweet sorceries," in Swinburne's account, "arouse disturbing visions in men, the antique Venus come back to the modern world, with her mercies and her cruelties" (66). As in two of the most well-known representations of Lucretia Borgia by Bartolomeo Veneto (which actually does not show Lucretia, but has always been associated with her; see ill. 1) and Pinturicchio (see ill. 2), she is positioned as both whore and holy, saintly as much as sexually alluring, a figure that for many seemed to provide a welcome contrast to the Victorian ideal woman — and the edge of the same logic.

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The Erotics and Politics of Masochistic Self-Abjection in *Jackass*

By Fintan Walsh, Trinity College, Dublin

Abstract:

This paper examines the role of masochistic self-abjection in the construction and operation of heteronormative masculinity in *Jackass: The Movie* (2002) with reference to the *Jackass* series, offshoot series, and *Jackass: Number Two* (2006). The paper begins by analysing how masculinity is constructed through masochistic acts, presented as if rites of initiation that involve the abjection, figurative castration and penetration of the male body. It also considers how males performatively control their 'object others' in the service of affirming a stable masculine core. The paper continues to assess the role played by comedy in the film, and questions whether *Jackass*, and its associated films/series, merely signifies the triumph of low culture or if it highlights a deeper problem with Western masculinity.

1 Within popular media circles in the 1990s, one of the recuperative strains of masculinity politics became known as 'laddism' or 'new laddism.' Central to laddism's various discursive inflections was the strategic infantilisation of males to the reductive stereotype that 'boys will be boys.' This infantilisation might well be seen as a highly manipulative discursive practice, designed to cultivate the association that laddish behaviour is innate but innocuous, and something that males will overcome with time. The term new laddism reframes laddish behaviour more definitively as a reactionary response to feminism; the prefixing 'new' implying that this behaviour pre-existed and even inspired the feminist movement. Critics that have looked upon discourses of male victimisation with suspicion have also seen in the discursive strategies of new laddism a calculated transposition of masculine norms, designed to license a whole range of negative behaviours, which are often homophobic and misogynistic. Commenting on this trend, Garry Whannel suggests that while new laddism has been defended and promoted as "a form of post-modern irony," it actually represents a reconstruction of pre-feminist masculinity, replete with "masculine fears of the female 'Other,' masquerading as desire" (257). In an equally doubting, tongue-in-cheek tone, Pat Stack reflects:

The new lad is apparently harmless. Unlike the traditional 'working class lad', the new lad is not violent, nor is he racist. He is an educated, middle class, witty character who is only reclaiming parts of harmless masculinity from the horrors of feminism and the terrible wimpishness of the 'new man' era. The new lad is, according to his defenders, only reaffirming the fact that men like a pint, like their sport, and find women sexually attractive. The new lad is still 'alternative' when it comes to comedy, but is free of the sexual prudishness of the original alternative comedy scene. (no pag.)

In its variously loud, aggressive and comic manifestations, laddism or new laddism has also become a highly marketable cultural phenomenon over the past decade. In more recent years,

it has found its greatest support in a range of television shows produced by MTV. At the forefront of this global mediation is the hugely successful *Jackass* series, which has inspired a number of offshoot productions such as *Viva La Bam* (USA, 2003), *Dirty Sanchez* (U.K., 2003) and *Wildboyz* (USA, 2004). All of these shows involve a large group of young, ostensibly heterosexual men — many of whom appear in a number of the shows listed — carrying out a range of laddish acts typically of a masochistic nature. In the context of these productions, masochism appears as a form of self-abjection that frequently involves revelling in scatology, submitting to physical harm and yielding to otherness.

2 This article examines the role of masochistic self-abjection in the construction and operation of heteronormative masculinity primarily through an analysis of *Jackass: The Movie* (2002), mindful of the fact that many of the non-linear film's scenarios, or enactments of a similar kind, feature in the *Jackass* series, numerous offshoot series, and the recently released *Jackass: Number Two* (2006).¹ The analysis of *Jackass* provided here begins by analysing how masculinity is constructed in the film through masochistic acts — presented as if rites of initiation — that involve the abjection, figurative castration and penetration of the male body. It also examines how males performatively control their 'object others' in the service of affirming a stable masculine core. The paper continues to assess the role played by comedy in the film, and questions whether *Jackass*, and its associated films/series, merely signifies the triumph of low culture or if it highlights a deeper problem with contemporary Western masculinity.

The Boundaries of Male Subjectivity

3 A central feature of *Jackass* is the exploration of the boundaries of male subjectivity through acts that involve scatological and fluidic abjection, figurative castration and the violation of the male body. While these are seemingly anti-phallic gestures; in male subjects' playful relationship to the acts and in their endurance and survival of them, the relationship between corporeal resistance (which does not necessarily rely on exertive muscularity) and an essential, inviolable male core is reinforced. Sociologist Tony Jefferson draws attention to the centrality of endurance to masculinity when he suggests that normative masculinity involves "a certain indifference to the body" as well as "hardness," manifest in willingness for endurance. He also suggests that this hardness is mental as well as physical. Inverting

¹ *Jackass: Number Two* was released at the time of this article's writing. However, it does not explore anything conceptually different to the first film or the series that would necessitate discrete analysis here. Nonetheless, its very production marks a culmination in the popular culture's representation of troubled masculinity that I assess in the closing paragraphs of this paper.

Freudian and Lacanian positions that suggest that masculinity is characterized by outward activity, he expands:

Muscular strength has long been associated with masculinity, as a symbol of perfection, a matter of beauty combined with strength in different ways. The muscular body offers both power and pleasure. How does this fit with hardness? The Freudian line suggests that muscular bodies are simply symbolic extensions of the penis and phallic mystique. But this is reductionist, barely saved by the Lacanian notion of the phallus as a symbol rather than an actual organ. (77-98)

In his revision of these psychoanalytic positions, Jefferson suggests that "hardness" involves not just strength but willingness "to risk the body in performance" (81). And it is through the taking of these risks that the so-called jackasses prove their masculine worth. This is also the line taken by Joyce Carol Oates in *On Boxing* when she reflects: "The Sweet Science of Bruising celebrates the physicality of men even as it dramatises the limitations, sometimes tragic, more often poignant, of the physical" (9). Although written specifically about professional boxing, Oates' thoughts are equally as applicable to all activities based on male-male contact and pain endurance.

Scatological and Fluidic Abjection

4 Discourses of abjection maintain that the abject emerges as that which defies borders. In Julia Kristeva's well-known contribution, faces, urine and mortification all amount to examples of the abject, as they seem to "come from an outside or an exorbitant inside" and they are "unassimilable." While the subject typically rejects the abject in the bid for a definable self, Kristeva suggests that "a pole of attraction and repulsion" (125) characterises the self-abject relationship, as it does in *Jackass*, which finds the self contemplating its relation to the abject in terms of "Not me. Not that. But not nothing either. A 'something' that I do not recognise as a thing" (126). Despite the feeling of attraction and repulsion that the abject excites and mobilises, the self faces annihilation when it acknowledges that the abject is actually part of the self. This recognition sparks the experience of abjection, when "the subject finds the impossible in himself: when he finds the impossible in his very being, discovering that he is nothing other than abject" (128).

5 A recurring motif in *Jackass* is the wilful celebration of scatology and the opening of the body to apparent vulnerability. In an extended scene of the film, for example, Dave England prepares for a task that involves defecating in a display toilet in a hardware store. In advance of entering the shop, England and his *Jackass* comrades sit in the crew van, where England confesses to desperately needing to use the toilet. With that, the men push him around the van and press on his intestines, forcing him to defecate in the cramped vehicle. In

response, the group roll about laughing, until some of the men tumble out from the van and others vomit. Later in the day, England returns to the store and undertakes the task as planned. When reproached by staff, he pleads ignorance, and leaves the store. This occasion of public excretion mirrors a scenario from Season Two of the television series that involves Chris Raab defecating on the side of the road, provoking disturbed looks from passers-by, and laughter from his *Jackass* companions. These instances also resonate with scenes from Season Three, such as one involving Knoxville's nephew being recorded passing wind and defecating in the living room of his family home, while being watched by Knoxville and his grandfather, as if in some kind of male rite of (back) passage.

6 This revelling in scatology is evidenced in numerous other scenes in the film. Steve-O's "Tropical Pole-Vaulting" task sees the masochist vault around palm trees, volleyball nets and public spaces. His exercise culminates in an effort to leap across a sewerage-filled river. As expected, he fails to traverse the river completely and plunges in, only to develop an infection later on. The performer's distinctive penchant for ingesting the abject is further evidenced in his snorting of wasabi in a sushi restaurant, which results in him vomiting all over a plate, to his own delight and to that of his fellow jackasses. For Steve-O, this pattern is well established: in Series One, he snorts a live earth worm and coughs it out through his mouth.

7 One of the film's most grotesque scatological experiments is the "Yellow Snow Cone" scene. Set at night-time, it involves Ehren McGhehey forming a cone out of snow. Once the snow is packed, McGhehey urinates on it and proceeds to eat the cone, as the crew urge him on. Despite their encouragement, McGhehey shows signs of reluctance and begins to vomit in the snow. With that, Dave England runs towards him and kicks him in the testicles, forcing him to fall on the snow, and vomit again. England's enthusiasm is rooted in the fact that he is particularly accomplished at consuming his own bodily waste. In the second season of the television series he eats the raw ingredients for an omelette — onion, peppers, butter, cheese, tomato, milk and eggs — before regurgitating them and cooking the substance into an omelette, which he subsequently eats. And in Season Three of the series, England consumes the excrement from dirty diapers. Here, the abject does not devour England, as Kristeva suggests it inevitably does (127); rather in a bid to master his corporeal impulses, he repeatedly devours and expels it.

8 In *Jackass*, the men repeatedly seek out the abject within the self. However, they do not recognise the abject to "the point where meaning collapses" (126). Rather, they excrete and ingest the abject in a mood of irreverence and nonchalance, attempting to deny its

disturbance of identity. As an example of abjection, Kristeva describes the body's rejection of spoiled milk. She writes: "'I' or the self does not want the milk: 'I' do(es) not assimilate it, 'I' expel(s) it" (127). And in this process of expulsion, the body rejects itself as it rejects the milk, a dynamic which frames abjection as the simultaneous repulsion of what the self is not as well as what the self is. On the contrary, the *Jackass* team actively seek out the correlates of spoiled milk; not to confirm the fragility of male identity, but through the masochistic defiance of a self-object or self-other relationship, to assert the indestructibility of the male subject's identity. In other words, self-abjection is not an anti-normative, queer gesture. Rather, in exhibitionistically enduring and surviving it, male self-abjection signifies the subject's triumph over vulnerability and violability.

9 The shows leading man, Johnny Knoxville, shows a particular affinity for fluidic, above scatological, abjection. In one scene of the film, Knoxville stands on a lawn while a great wave of water is released from a shoot overhead, forcing him to stand his ground in its wake. Arising from his drowning, Knoxville immediately asks the cameraman "How did it look?" in a moment that foregrounds the narcissistic, self-conscious nature of his masculinity. This scene is reminiscent of one in Series Two, which involves Knoxville positioning himself in front of an emergency services water hose, emitting water at a rate of 325 gallons per minute. Assuming a range of positions that include free standing, sitting on bike and reading a newspaper, Knoxville attempts to withstand the great elemental force. The will to survive the oceanic is understood by figures such as Kristeva and Klaus Theweleit as symptomatic of a desire to withstand the threat posed by maternal and feminine sexuality. In his study of the relationship between misogyny and fascism entitled *Male Fantasies I: Women, Floods, Bodies, History* Theweleit sees in recurring phobias of water and fluidic destruction a fear of dissolving the boundaries of male identity, related to a reactive need to affirm the body's hardness and invulnerability. This affirmation is precisely what Knoxville seeks when he addresses his crew.

Castration

10 Castration is one of the most recurrent tropes of both the *Jackass* series and the film. In "Approaching Abjection," Kristeva associates abjection to castration, linking the experience of abjection to the knowledge of castration. The first episodes of both Series Two and Three of the *Jackass* series begin with scenes that relate to this theme. In the second season a group of children are invited to kick Johnny Knoxville's cupped testicles as hard as they can, encouraged from the sidelines by their mothers and Knoxville himself. Following

this endurance test, other members of the crew hit Knoxville's testicles with tennis balls, pool balls and a sledgehammer. While these scenes play upon the threat of castration, they ultimately foreground the fact that castration has *not* taken place, as it has with female sexuality in the writings of Freud. It is for this reason that Freud describes the castration complex in "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" as a "rejection of femininity" (211). In this orchestration, the male 'victim's' indestructibility as a phallic agent is reinforced, a premise established by Knoxville at the beginning of the *Jackass* phenomenon when, in the first episode of Season One, he is shot from a cannon and runs around with a large dildo in his pants.



Fig. 1.

11 One of the film's most elaborate and dangerous performances of castration takes place as part of "The Muscle Stimulator" scene. Here, Pontius, Knoxville, Ehren and England place muscle stimulators at high voltage around various parts of their bodies. Sitting semi-naked around a table, they all take turns, with one placing the pads on his face, another on his thumbs and another on his chest. Once the pads are in position, they are activated by the other men, who laugh hysterically at the genuine pain of their comrades. When one of the men reacts with particular discomfort, Knoxville urges him on with "You ok. It's cool. Come on. Daddy's got ya. Daddy's got ya." And so, reminded by the 'Father' (replete with its Lacanian associations) of the masochism inherent in their homosocial bonding, he willingly endures the

pain. With that, Knoxville calls for someone brave enough to step forward and have his testicles electrocuted. Both England and Pontius oblige, their pain rewarded with affirming applause and laughter from their male colleagues. In this moment the relationship between the *Jackass* men resonates with that between the Narrator (Edward Norton) and Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt) in *Fight Club*, a film which also explores the erotic relationship between masochism and masculinity: "Hit me again," the Narrator says to Durden, following their initial exchange of blows. "No, you hit me," Durden replies.

12 The scene entitled "Bungee Wedgie" requires the *Jackass* team to wear underpants, suspended with bungee ropes from a tree, from which they ritualistically jump off. The task's objective is to endure the pain caused by the impact of the drop. When Chris Raab dives, he injures himself so badly that he bleeds, to the delight of Knoxville, who cheers: "the bloody, shitty underpants," which the camera duly focuses on. "The bloody, shitty underpants" is not a sign of abject defeat, however, but a trophy of endurance. In this, the scene repeats the terms inaugurated by Knoxville in Season Three, when five of the *Jackass* team hit each other with balls in the testicles, under the order "whoever can't take getting hit in the bullseyes anymore will be the loser and the other guy will be the victor." In this abiding hunger for suffering, *Jackass* dramatically validates the thesis forwarded by David Morris in *The Culture of Pain*,² that pain is the defining illness of our self-absorbed era; symptomatic of a desperate will for control.

13 While these scenes of 'castration' may be bound up on some level with an identity crisis, or at least anxiety; they are ultimately exploited to confirm that the threat of castration is repeatedly survived. In *Jackass*, injuring the genitals is a mark of masculine prowess — which is authorial and ostensibly personal; the ensuing sensation alerting the subject to the biological connection between the penis and the right to the symbolic phallus. In Lacan's writing, the fear of castration is linked to a series of other anxieties surrounding body dismemberment and fragmentation, understood to originate in the mirror stage. During this phase of development, anxiety is provoked by the individual's perception of difference between its image of synthesis and its feeling of fragmentation, which precipitates the development of the ego and the pursuit of specular unity. In "Aggressivity and Psychoanalysis" Lacan claims that the subject is forever threatened by memories of the original sense of fragmentation, which manifest themselves in "images of castration, emasculation, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, bursting open

² Morris claims that contemporary Western culture is increasingly absorbed by the notion of pain. With reference to history, art, literature, psychology and medicine, Morris explores how pain is both a 'biological fact' and 'an experience in search of meaning.'

of the body" (11). To appease this threat (which seems to be the main objective of the *Jackass* rituals) the men attempt to confirm the unity of the body through its ability to either resist or recover from violation. In this masochistic relation to the self, the men bear witness to Carlo Strenger's premise that masochism signifies "a profound expression of the desire for self-creation" (138).

Violating and Penetrating the Male Body

14 In addition to scatology and castration, the violation of the male body is a central feature of the film's construction of masculinity. Culturally speaking, the male body, unlike the female body, is considered to be a closed form; its physical integrity supporting the perceived stability of masculinity. In *Jackass*, however, it is the endurance of and recovery from the violation of the body which accrues masculine worth. In another of the film's most gruesome scenes, the *Jackass* team gather in a hotel room while Johnny Knoxville slices in between his finger and toes with paper. He grimaces and screams initially, but when his friends cheer, he too starts to laugh hysterically. In the excitement, Knoxville's fellow performer Steve-O is prompted to sever the sides of his mouth with paper. As happens on more than one occasion, the action becomes too much for one cameraman who vomits and faints. Whether genuine or orchestrated, the implicit message is that not all men are as hard as the self-abjecting *Jackass* performers.

15 One of the film's most critically noted tasks involves Johnny Knoxville being shot with a beanbag projectile travelling at 250 foot per second.³ In preparing for the task, an instructor avows that contact with Knoxville's chest will be avoided as it runs a higher risk of mortality. Once shot, Knoxville immediately drops to the ground in apparent agony, and is quickly brought to a hospital. Two days later, he reveals the extensive tissue damage incurred. It is worth noting that this is not the first time that Knoxville has been shot. In the MTV series he shoots himself with a 30-calibre handgun. He has also posed being shot by a paint gun for the cover of *Rolling Stone* magazine, a mark of the iconicity of his masochism. As the leading jackass, it is no surprise that Knoxville undertakes the most dangerous tasks in the film and in the series; in fact, it is his very willingness to repeatedly risk his safety and endure pain in this way that secures his position as the dominant male.

16 "Ass Kicked by a Girl" involves Ryan Dunne fighting the World Women's lightweight boxing champion Kumagai Naoka. It is one of the few representations of women in the film, constructed in the likeness of the phallicised, dominant female featuring in Sacher-

³ The enactment clearly references Chris Burden's *Shoot* (1971), a 'performance' that involved the artist shooting himself.

Masoch's *Venus in Furs*.⁴ Although Dunne seems to mock his own and possibly even his opponent's participation by wearing female underwear in the ring, he confides to the camera his fear of being "about to get the shit kicked out of me by a girl." His friends do not show a similar concern; rather they excitedly surround the boxing ring in various states of undress. From here, in a homoerotic mosh, they chant and cheer as Dunne is repeatedly beaten by Naoka in the ring; even as his jaw bleeds and he is nearly knocked unconscious. Jefferson writes about boxing's unique power structure, claiming that the sport provides "the ultimate arena for the display of hardness" because boxers require the ability to "soak up punishment as well as dish it out" (83). In the context of the *Jackass* scene in question, Jefferson's insight, like that of Oates offered earlier, implies that a man's ability to "soak up" punishment from the female other, which runs the risk of fracturing the male ego, would not only validate his physical but also mental strength.



Fig.2.

⁴ In Sacher-Masoch's 1870 novel on male masochism, *Venus in Furs* (London: Penguin, 2006), the leading character Wanda von Dunajew is asked by Severin von Kusiemski to treat him in progressively more degrading ways. In literature, Wanda stands out for her phallic construction. Notable critical responses include Gilles Deleuze's *Sacher-Masoch: An Interpretation* (1971).

17 While the violation of the male body poses a threat to male authority, penetrating the male body runs the risk of terminally disrupting the codes of heteronormative heterosexuality. This is largely due to the fact that penetration is a more complete gesture that reveals, without ambiguity, the violability of the male body. This threat is also due to the fact that the penetration of the male body is associated with male homosexuality, male heterosexuality's abject correlate that defies the border-controls of paternal Law. For this reason, scenes involving the participation in and reaction to the penetration of the male body in the film are most revealing of the boundaries of acceptable heterosexual male activity. Two scenes focus explicitly on this motif. The first involves Steve-O — one of the most daring of the group — being challenged to insert a glass bottle in his anus. Although he does not turn down any other task on screen, he refuses to undertake this one, fearing that his father would disown him. One of the crew, surprised by his response, asks "You said that you didn't want to do it cause your dad would disown you? [. . .] You drank wine of a dudes ass crack!" Steve's only defence of his stance is "My dad never saw that; never told him that." It is worth noting that Steve does not have any problem with inserting fireworks in his anus, as he does in the film and in the series. However, for a dominant male like Steve, prolonged anal penetration, which runs the risk of appearing pleasurable, is a step too far. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that he has his buttocks bolted together in season three of the television series.

18 In Steve-O's refusal, the task is taken up by Ryan Dunne, one of the more junior members of the group; a gesture which frames the action almost as an initiatory rite. In a bedroom, in the presence of a medic and other *Jackass* members, Ryan inserts a blue toy car (an object-choice which attempts to rescue his masculinity) into his rectum. Although Dunne was actually assisted in this task, some careful editing makes it look like he does it himself, in order for the film to avoid sodomy legislation active in some U.S. states. When, during this process, another man walks into the room, Dunne calls out "Tell me I'm a man!" He does not get an answer yet, however; the status of his masculinity is strictly dependent upon how successfully he endures the process.

19 In the collection of essays of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, entitled *The Shell and the Kernel*, the psychoanalysts contend that identification belongs to the realm of incorporations, which sees the prohibited love object of the Oedipus Complex settle in the ego "in order to compensate for the lost pleasure and failed introjection" (113). Judith Butler takes up this point in *Gender Trouble* to question where the incorporated bodily space might be: "If it is not literally within the body," she queries, then "the body must itself be understood as an incorporated space" (86). In the *Jackass* scene under discussion, the "incorporated space" is

literally "within the body." While the toy car is an object of masculine identification, its actual bodily incorporation sees identification moves dangerously into the realm of desire. However, in presenting the task as an act of endurance, Dunne manages to rescue his heterosexuality.

20 Once the car is inserted, Dunne attends a doctor for an x-ray, reporting to be experience pains following a fraternity party. When the doctor discovers a toy car in his rectum he calls a colleague and confides: "They were having sex with each other, and stuff like that." Referred to someone else, Dunne leaves the clinic with a caution from the doctor: "You just go to the doctor. You don't talk to anybody [. . .] to your girlfriend, to your boyfriend, to whomever [. . .] You don't tell nobody, all right. He already knows [pointing to the one of the crew] — that's too many people." Despite the doctor's sympathies, many of which relate to fears of gender and sexual transgression, Dunne's 'suffering' is merely a reflexively affirming contrivance; what psychoanalyst Robert Stoller refers to as "fraudulent suffering": "A creator of the performance, the masochist is never truly a victim, because he never really relinquishes control, and in that sense the whole scenario is known only to portray fraudulent suffering" (229).



Fig. 3.

The Abject Others of Stable Masculinity

21 In addition to those self-abjecting acts that test and ultimately affirm the masculinity of the enacting male subjects, *Jackass* includes many less painful, less dangerous scenarios of

a prankster variety. Thematically, these centre on infantilisation, ageing, obesity and aberrant male physicality; all of which are typically anti-normative positions/relations associated with the abject end of the masculine spectrum. Despite the light, comic rendering of these enactments, I argue that they are also part of an effort by the male subjects to performatively control feelings of vulnerability induced by exposure to otherness that have, could or will inevitably undermine masculine authority.

22 At the beginning of this article, I elucidated the relationship between laddism and male infantilisation. In this conflation it is inevitable that many of the scenarios in *Jackass* involve an element of juvenility. Here, juvenility functions as a stratagem that licenses a range of anti-social behaviours, extending the boundaries of acceptable male behaviour. This is most clearly evidenced in the frequency of activities that involve children's toys or children's activities. As mentioned earlier, many of the *Jackass* cast come from skateboarding backgrounds and this is reflected in the number of tasks which involve skateboarding and bike-riding. In one scene in the film, Johnny Knoxville attaches bottle rockets to the back of a pair of skates and goes roller-skating. In another, entitled "Roller Disco Trunk," Bam Margera, Steve-O, Chris Pontius, Johnny Knoxville and Ryan Dunne all dress up in seventies clothes and roller-skate in the back of a truck. When Preston starts driving the truck haphazardly, the men are knocked about inside, and fall to the ground, laughing. In another scene, Johnny Knoxville tries to skate down the handrail of steep outdoor steps. He falls, but laughs regardless. Similar acts recur in the television series, and include the cast ice-skating over barrels, skating on ice-blocks, snowboarding naked and rolling down golf courses (all from Season Three). This air of juvenility also acts as a ruse for the acceptable cultivation of hard, sporting masculinity, which, despite its presentation here, is based upon "muscularity, a lack of sentiment, acceptance of pain" and a will to "reassert a traditional masculinity [. . .confronting. . .] dishonorable feminised men" (Whannel 256).

23 Perhaps more telling of male anxiety are scenes that involve the characters' dressing up as old men. Wearing customised silicon masks, they carry out a range of unlikely events in public, including rapping in streets, riding mopeds down flights of steps and freewheeling down hills. Another recurring portrayal is that of an 'old man' shoplifting, deliberately provoking shop staff and security to confrontation. The punch line seems to be that an 'old man,' assumed by the social majority to be impotent, is extremely physically and mentally competent in defending himself. This trope of preserving strength in old age is most vividly manifest in a scene which involves Johnny Knoxville, dressed as an old man, weightlifting in a gym. The gym instructor, anxious for his safety, asks if he needs assistance.

Soon after Knoxville has turned down the offer, he falls on the ground with a weight pressed against his neck, prompting the instructor to frantically hurry to his help. Knoxville rises, coughing, amused by his diversionary tactic. These performances that draw on representations of youth and old age collectively signify the male aspiration for continuous, inviolable presence and strength. As explicit masochistic self-abjection reflexively empowers the enacting subject, these performances of vulnerability are exploited to assert the indestructibility of the *Jackass* males.



Fig. 4.

24 In contrast to these depictions, the film has a particularly negative take on obesity. There are numerous scenes that centre on the comic spectacle of obesity, pitted in direct contrast to the discipline of the masochist's body. In one scene a morbidly obese man, who is eating on a bench, breaks it. In another incident, a BMX cyclist tries to tow away a couch on which an obese man sits. Similarly, in a scene entitled "Sweaty Fat Fucks," Bam and his two friends, Matt Hoffman and Tony Hawk, are padded to appear grossly overweight and skate around a park. Unable to move as agilely as normal, they fall around the ring, injuring themselves and snapping their skate boards. This depiction resonates with one from Season Three that involves Bam Margera costumed as if overweight, and repeatedly falling off a treadmill.

25 In contrast to this spectacle of impotent masculinity, the masculinity of Jason Acuña — known as "wee man" on account of his dwarfism — is celebrated. Although masculine

prowess is typically associated with physical size, potency is also determined by a capacity for hardness. Acuña validates his masculinity via his ability to endure rather than inflict. His culturally aberrant size is celebrated for it permits him to endure unique circumstances, unavailable to the other men. For example, he dodges crowds while being chased and eventually attacked by a sumo wrestler; hides under a traffic cone in order to obstruct crowded streets, and kicks himself in the head for the amusement of the group. In the recording of a video for the singer Shaq, shown in Season Three, Acuña allows Shaq to repeatedly simulate sex with him.

Becoming M-Animal

26 Many of the film's rituals of self-abjection involve animals. On one occasion, Knoxville's powers of endurance are tested when a baby alligator is deliberately placed in front of his chest until it bites down on his nipple. His feat in the film, however, does not upstage his performance in Season Two, when he plays matador to a number of ranging bulls, or when he covers his face with leeches to contrive Abraham Lincoln's beard. In another scene from the film, Chris Pontius (dressed in a bikini) tries to ward off alligators in a pond while Steve-O attempts to walk a tightrope overhead. In advance of the action, Pontius speaks directly to the camera, saying: "Any of these alligators try to ruin our swimming; I'm going to wrestle them down and probably have my way with them." When Steve falls into the water, Pontius helps him get back up safely, but this time he attaches a piece of meat to his underwear, and dangles it over the alligator's heads. One bites, as the *Jackass* team look on cheering, but Steve-O remains untouched. The jackasses' penchant for alligators is also evident in the scene described earlier, which involves Bam Margera placing one in his mothers' kitchen. On another occasion, Steve-O and Pontius scuba dive with whale sharks, first filling their underwear with shrimp in order to entice the sharks closer, and foreground the threat of castration. When the sharks only eat the shrimp, the men's survival is presented as a phallic triumph, despite Pontius' emerging awareness of the discrepancy between his physical phallus and its symbolic referent: "My penis looks really small right now. I can't really look cool right now." During the same diving expedition, Steve-O and Pontius are told by their diving instructor that sea anemones release white fluid when scared. When underwater, they both grab hold of anemones and rub them in a masturbatory fashion, until they omit the seminal fluid. In another scene, Pontius dresses as a mouse and goes into a cage with a cheetah that lashes him with her paw.

27 In this attraction to animals for masochistic pleasure, the *Jackass* males reveal a power differential between the masochist and the sadist, which privileges the former. For with animals, the men enjoy more control and predictability than with human encounters. In this, they exemplify Deleuze's imagining of the masochist as "a victim in search of a torturer" (*Masochism* 20), less than they "become-animal," as in his and Felix Guattari's non-subjective explication of the term in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. This attraction to animal pain is also a variation of the attraction to the inanimate abject, for both relationships are marked by an indifference towards the structural parameters which create system, order and identity. However, humanity and animalism do not mix here as they do in Mikhail Bakhtin's grotesque animal-human hybrids, which are capable of negotiating a multiplicity of identities (25). Despite Johnny Knoxville's threat to inseminate a cow himself in Season Two, males unquestionably supersede animals and masculinity is bolstered by distinguishing its prowess from the undisciplined variety of animals, which the men are ultimately in command of.

The Triumph of Low Culture?

28 One of the most frequent interpretations of the *Jackass* phenomenon is that it represents the triumph of low culture in late capitalist society. Reading *Jackass* in this light, one might come to see the phenomenon as a developmental fusion of decades of action movies, sporting obsession and reality television, carefully constructed here as a series of quick-fix fragments of 'real-life' riotous carnival. However, owing to the fact that *Jackass* has spawned so many similar shows which dominate our screens and popular cultural references, such interpretations seem reductive. In support of the reading I offer here, which considers the role of self-abjection in the dynamics of gender and sexuality, I'd like to first dismiss suggestions that *Jackass* is merely the carnivalesque eruption of low culture into the public arena. As Bakhtin saw it, one of the most important features of the aesthetic of carnival is the critique of dominant discourses: "Carnival promotes a ludic and critical relation to all official discourses, whether political, literary or ecclesiastical" (Stam 134). On the contrary, *Jackass* is not critical of dominant ideologies. Rather, the show is extremely narrow in its points of focus, which almost exclusively relate to issues of male gender and sexuality. This relationship, though presented as playful, is not critically examined. Further, while these male bodies are pushed to their limits, they are not the elastic, malleable, unfinished forms of the carnival tradition. Conversely, gender and sexuality are treated without the celebration of alterity which Bakhtinian representation requires. It was this very quality of Bakhtinian

thought which inspired Kristeva to seek ways of transcending the metaphysical category of difference in her concept of the semiotic and in her reworking of the concept of the carnivalesque, to the point where "discourse attains its 'potential infinity' [...] where prohibitions (representation, 'monologism') and their transgression (drama, body, 'dialogism') coexist" (Kaplan 33).

29 Reflecting on Bakhtin's contribution to Leftist cultural critique, Robert Stam warns of the dangers of co-opting Bakhtin's theories for the discernment of "redeeming elements even in the most degraded cultural productions and activities" (135). Drawing specifically on the example of fraternity films, such as *Animal House* (1978), Stam cautions how some 'carnavalesque' behavior actually supports the dominant power structures it is presumed to critique: "It would be wrong, for example, to see the beer-fuelled carousing of fraternity boys in *Animal House* as a Bakhtinian celebration of people's culture, since fraternity boys and their macho rituals form an integral part of the power structure which authentic carnival symbolically overturns" (135). Stam's comment reads like a timely reservation for those who claim that *Jackass* is merely an example of laddish, low culture which is funny, foolish and harmless. Even aside from the gender dimension, surely no film or show produced by MTV can call itself carnival in the Bakhtinian sense of the term. In *Jackass*'s near dominance of the station, reflected in the series repeats as well as in off-shoot series, there is no sign that this is "the oppositional culture of the oppressed, the official world as seen from below" (135).

30 In "Sliding Off the Stereotype: Gender Difference in the Future of Television," William Galperin suggests that televised action and sporting events, of which I consider *Jackass* to be a contemporary example, might be seen to give form to male fantasies, giving men access to a power they otherwise lack. Galperin argues that such representations cultivate "an absorption of men by men" (149). Inflecting a paternal metaphor, Galperin makes a distinction between action sports and soap operas: "If televised sports can be said, on occasion, to render the divine incarnate — to mystify the human in the image of the Father — soap operas tend rather to retrace this movement back to the very structure that requires God to be a *father*" (155). Although Galperin refers specifically to sport, his comments are as relevant to other action-based performances, not least of all to *Jackass*. In its celebration of the omnipotent male, it also 'renders the divine incarnate,' and in this it might be seen to exemplify the trend in cultural representation that Galperin identified embryonically in the late 1980s. For David Savran, this may well explain the show's appeal: "It may be that the macho stunts on *Jackass* strike a chord with some viewers at a time when cultural changes

have diluted traditional ideas of masculinity [. . .]. The humiliation proves you're a man, proves you're tough" (Savran qtd. in Breznican, no pag.).

31 In addition to being a masculinising practice, masochistic self-abjection in *Jackass* also allows the male subjects to form apparently close heterosexual male relationships. In *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick examines the boundaries separating sexual and nonsexual male relationships. For Sedgwick, homosocial and homosexual relationships are not diametrically oppositional: "'Homosocial desire,' to begin with, is a kind of oxymoron. 'Homosocial' is a word [. . .] [that] describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed with analogy with 'homosexual,' and just as obviously meant to distinguish from 'homosexual'" (1). For Sedgwick, homosocial and homosexual relationships may be seen to exist on a continuum, which she sees evidenced in the "erotic triangle" of Victorian literature, comprised of two males in active pursuit of a "passive" female (21). However, in *Jackass*, no female is pursued. Rather, masochism functions like the apex of Sedgwick's erotic triangle, giving the male subjects access to homosocial relationships which are intimate and sometimes erotic, but ultimately aggressive enough to avoid entering the domain of the homosexual. In this omission of female subjectivity, and also in its refusal of homosexuality, *Jackass* performs the Law-sustaining and male-privileging masochistic relationship which Freud describes in his analysis of beating fantasies ("A Child is Being Beaten") and which Savran sees as patriarchy's chief mode of cultural reproduction, that "reveals and conceals [. . .] the homoeroticism that undergirds patriarchy and male homosocial relations" (32).

32 While this article has maintained that self-abjection functions as a masculinising strategy in *Jackass*, which simultaneously affords males access to homosocial intimacy, the film concludes with a scene called "Son of Jackass" which, in a genuinely parodic fashion, imagines the behaviour of the cast in 2063. In a reworking of the film's opening scene, the men, made up to look old, emerge from the smoky distance to *O Fortuna*. Now, however, they are not aggressively riding in a shopping trolley but are attached to intravenous drips, riding on geriatric bikes and holding walking sticks. Like the opening scene, there is an explosion here too, but now the men are not immune to harm. Instead, they are killed by exploding cars; engulfed by flames and decapitated by shrapnel. This concluding scenario would seem to acknowledge — contrary to other claims in the film and in the series — the ultimate destructibility of the male performers; the fact that there will come a time when their endurance testing will not confirm anything about their masculinity, but rather their mortality.

And yet, in Steve-O's final exclamation, lurched at the camera — "Yeah Dude!" — the jackasses seem to relish in this nihilism, which only gives urgency to their masochistic, self-abjecting exploits.

Points of Enunciation and Deconstruction

33 Throughout this analysis I have maintained that *Jackass: The Movie*, like the series, is primarily concerned with the relationship between male masochistic self-abjection and heteronormative masculinity. It is a film which reveals the centrality of masochism to stable male identity and one which charts the efforts of the male performers to control the abject others of stable male identity. Although almost frivolously presented as a series of fragmented, comic scenarios, Jackass cannot be applauded for being parodic of its subject matter or dismissed as merely popular postmodern entertainment, comprised of an excess of signs that avoid precise signification. For although Allan Bloom and Jean Baudrillard have accused mass culture of devaluating meaning, in the early days of MTV production, before *Jackass* was ever conceived, figures like Ann Kaplan warned of the dangers of depoliticising its output:

Narrative/non-narrative is no longer a useful category within which to discuss videos. What is important is, first, whether or not any position manifests itself across the hectic, often incoherent flow of signifiers which are not necessarily organized in to a chain that produces a signified, and, second, what are the implications of the twenty-four hour flow of short (four-minute or less) texts that all more or less function as ads [. . .]. In line with Baudrillard's theory, MTV partly exploits the imaginary desires allowed free play through the various sixties liberation movements, divesting them, for commercial reasons, of their originally revolutionary implications. (36)

Although it is blatant in its exploration of the relationship between masochistic self-abjection and masculinity, Jackass is rarely critical of it. There are very few incidents which reveal the performers' inability to endure these rituals, and when this does occur, it is usually affirmative of the codes heterosexual masculinity, as when Steve-O refuses to insert a bottle in his anus. In fact, the film seems to endorse the recuperation of a masculinity defined by its powers of endurance rather than by its powers of productivity; a masculinity which is qualified by submitting the male body to reflexively empowering laws of endurance. If any form of masculinity is critiqued in the film, it is the mainly absent kind that rejects the connection between the enduring male body and the accrual of power and authority; that hard vessel that feminism has tried to penetrate for decades. In the context of laddism, *Jackass* may well be seen to respond to a real crisis in Western masculinity but, over the influential course of the phenomenon's duration — and here we think of the sequel — it might also be seen to

signify the arrested commodification of genuine problems. Slavoj Žižek argues that significant moments of social change incorporate the abject as norm: "This moment of change is the moment at which the system restructures its rules in order to accommodate itself to new conditions by incorporating the originally subversive moment" (328). In its pervasion of popular culture, I suggest that this is precisely what the *Jackass* phenomenon signifies at this moment in time: the management and assimilation of real social problems by the symbolic order.

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Susan Gillman and Alys Eve Weinbaum, eds. *Next to the Color Line: Gender, Sexuality, and W.E.B. Du Bois*. University of Minnesota Press, 2007

By Beauty Bragg, Georgia College and State University, USA

1 Editors Susan Gillman and Alys Eve Weinbaum have assembled a collection of remarkable essays which enact a "politics of juxtaposition" defined as "a reading practice that deals with the unspoken, disrupted, or unfinished synergies that emerge among and between parts as often as with manifest content and stated import of the text" (8). This is a concept which they derive from Du Bois's own positioning of the question of gender "next to the color line." They argue that, in framing the two questions as adjacent, Du Bois at once connects them and insists on their discreteness. From this fluid image the authors derive a critical methodology that also informs their organization of the essays. The essays presented herein are clustered by categories of analysis that foster complex perspectives on the man and his work.

2 The first three chapters, Vilashini Cooppan's "Move on Down the Line: Domestic Science, Transnational Politics, and Gendered Allegory in Du Bois," Joy James's "Profeminism and Gender Elites: W.E.B. Du Bois, Anna Julia Cooper and Ida B. Wells-Barnett" and Alys Eve Weinbaum's "Interracial Romance and Black Internationalism," are unified by their use of Du Bois's fiction as a touchstone for examining his political vision. Paying particular attention to the allegorical representations of women in *The Souls of Black Folk*, *Dark Princess* and *Darkwater*, Cooppan argues that Du Bois's interstitial notions of race, nation, theory and politics are all enabled by his fixed notions of gender which provide the ground against which the limitations of any fixed notion of these categories are exposed. That is, the women who people his texts are "persons whose conditions of existence constitute a critique of those systems" which formulate the definitions of racial and national belonging he seeks to explode (53).

3 Taking a rather harder line than Cooppan, James's reprinted essay is concerned with reading his fictionalized depictions of black women against contemporaneous figures like Anna Julia Cooper and Ida B. Wells who do not appear in his works either as actual figures or even as the bases for depictions that move beyond "the icon of black female martyr or noble sufferer" (75). The absence of any direct mention of these or several other politically active women represents a contradictory feminist practice. Ultimately, according to James, these erasures have the effect of normalizing the African-American male as the architects of black liberation, and "diminish[es] his gender progressivism" (70).

4 Finally, Weinbaum's chapter undertakes to reveal a "heretofore unacknowledged rhetorical detail" of Du Bois's work — the degree to which racial propaganda is predicated on interracial romance in his work. Through extended examinations of *Darkwater* and *Dark Princess*, Weinbaum demonstrates how Du Bois uses the form and the theme of romance "as a form of propaganda that conjures a black internationalist response to both U.S. racism and Euro-American Imperialism" and how this strategy inadvertently reproduces a kind of racial essentialism and heteronormativity at both national and international levels (101). The value of Du Bois's use of the trope of romance, despite the limitations she identifies, is that his fictional representations allow him to represent the relationship between democracy and the social choices (including interracial marriage) available to citizens, which his non-fiction writing could only hint at.

5 While the next three chapters also engage Du Bois's fiction to a large extent, they are keyed to Du Bois's understanding of history. In "Late Romance" Brent Hayes Edwards traces "The World of Color" from its initial essay form to the novel form that constitutes the last installment of the Black Flame trilogy. He argues that a certain formal dialecticism — expressed in Du Bois' habit of "afterthought" — structures individual works and may be identified in his complete body of works. This dialecticism, according to Hayes, leads Du Bois to privilege the form of the romance in his later works because its "categorical instability" offers a mode of communication well suited to the task of "track[ing] the many-sided connection between capitalism and the modalities of race" (134).

6 Claudia Tate's revised version of "Race and Desire: *Dark Princess*: A Romance" also charts the relation of form to the expression of Du Bois political vision. She identifies Du Bois's tendency to elide eroticism and racial uplift as a result of his particular "fantasmatic" structure in which the "emotional effect of laboring for racial uplift" is experienced "like the pleasure of libidinal satisfaction" (155). Tate's reading demonstrates how an understanding of his psychological processes helps to relocate the political vision that some critics have deemed lacking in his fiction. Taking *Dark Princess* as example, she argues that the form of the romance, with its emphasis on notions of the providential and (re)unification, provide a mechanism for articulating his belief in historical progress.

7 Offering re-readings of key moments and images in *Dark Princess*, Michele Elam and Paul C. Taylor's essay, "Du Bois's Erotics" counters Tate's conclusion that the novel fails to maintain the discursive link between the social and the erotic by asserting that the erotic is political. They arrive at their reading and broader conclusions by situating Du Bois's work in the context of the predominant literary and philosophical theories of his day. Citing the

ascendancy of notions of Transcendentalist self-evolution, and Pragmatic 'growth' as factors influencing his political vision (more because of their currency than because of a direct engagement of them by Du Bois), they suggest that Du Bois's contemporaries would have recognized his representations of the erotic as politicized.

8 A concern with illuminating various discursive constructions of Du Bois unifies the next three chapters. Hazel Carby's essay, "The Souls of Black Men" (also reprinted) examines Du Bois' self-construction as a model of progressive black masculinity and his position as the model for black intellectual ascent and its consequences for contemporary intellectual activity. Focusing primarily on *The Souls of Black Folk*, Carby argues that the structure of the text — an initial section grounded in feminized symbols of inoperative approaches to racial advancement, a middle section that moves into the economic world of black men, and finally the last section in which a proscriptive notion of black masculinity (based largely on Du Bois) emerges as the blueprint for black social and political advancement — establishes a very specific gendering of black progressivism. That his work functions as a model for subsequent black intellectual enterprise is linked, for Carby, to the continued marginalization of certain modes of black intellectual activity, such as feminist and queer approaches.

9 Roderick Ferguson's essay, "W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Discourse" extends Carby's vision. Ferguson grounds his analyses of the discursive operation of Du Bois in examinations of 1920's era Fisk University student protests (against curfews, sex segregation, and prohibitions against popular dance forms) and *Dark Princess*. He argues that in each case the attempted critical resistances are folded back into the itineraries of power because they ultimately position normative heterosexuality as the mechanism for expressing a radical political vision.

10 In Mason Stokes, "Father of the Bride" the discourse of heterosexual masculinity symbolized by the New Negro and Du Bois as embodiment of that ideology are brought together to mark a specific historical moment of transition from homosexuality as behavior to homosexuality as identity. Mining historical accounts of the marriage of Du Bois's daughter Yolande and Countee Cullen as well as correspondence between the three which documents the disintegration of the marriage, Stokes situates their various narratives of the marriages failure in the context of larger social and psychoanalytic shifts in the perception of heterosexuality.

11 The last three chapters of the collection centralize material culture in their analyses. The first, Fred Moten's "Uplift and Criminality," argues that Du Bois's formulation of rural black criminal pathology in the *Philadelphia Negro* and *The Souls of Black Folk* fails to

recognize the potential for criminality (defined as rebellion) as an alternative to uplift as the primary means of black re-socialization. Moten characterizes this politicized notion of criminality as "fugitivity," a term which is, in turn, associated with the songs of black women which are seen to represent a history of black resistance.

12 Shawn Michelle Smith's "Second-Sight: Du Bois and the Black Masculine Gaze" offers a gender analysis of the photographic material that comprised portions of the 1900 Paris Exposition's American Negro Exhibit. Presenting the photographs, which are dominated by portraits of "Negroes" who appear white and middle-class families, Smith illuminates the specific and strategic construction of gender ideals as central to the project of presenting visual challenges to the notion of racial differentiation.

13 The final chapter of the collection, Gillman's "Pageantry, Maternity, and World History," reinserts "gender as an analytic" in the historiography of pageantry, suggesting that *Darkwater* manages to achieve what the pageant did not — to give voice to individual women in a way that spoke for both black and female collectives — by quoting (though not attributing) the (auto)biographies of actual women (380). While James' essay reads Du Bois's failure to cite sources as acts of erasure, Gillman makes her own argument convincing by putting his use of women's voices in the context of early twentieth century pageantry's hostility to women as subjects of history.

14 These contributions are a valuable demonstration of Du Bois's twenty — first century relevance. Identifying the limitations of Du Bois's vision of international coalition among people of color or of black middle class leadership, for instance, provide crucial starting points for assessing deepening (inter)national class stratifications in the contemporary political landscape.

Tina Campt: *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender, and Memory in the Third Reich*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004

By Kyle Frackman, University of Massachusetts, USA

1 In *Other Germans*, Tina Campt offers a significant and timely contribution to German Studies, Holocaust scholarship, and research into the function of memory within a greater historical and cultural context. In the author's own words, her work "examines the historical discourses that preceded and enabled the emergence of a Black German subject"; further, she "analyzes how the processes of racial and gender formation designed by National Socialism to purge non-Aryans from the landscape of German society contributed in paradoxical ways to the production of some of the subjects it sought to expunge" (2). In order to set herself apart from other research into Germany's National Socialist past, Campt writes that, "this work examines the generative effects of this totalitarian government and the processes of racialization and gendering that constituted its fundamental organizing techniques and practices" (1-2). Thus, Campt begins to make the case for the value of her scholarship, observing that the era of National Socialist control is most often considered only or at least primarily for its "destructive capacity" (1-2).

2 In her introduction, Campt emphasizes the importance of context in scholarly studies, especially historical work. Contexts delimit the topic as well as often determine or facilitate the (mis)interpretation of the stories that are being reconstructed and told (1). Her objects of study are the interviews she conducted with two Black Germans who experienced and lived in Germany under the Nazi regime. Demonstrating her awareness of context, Campt notes that Afro-Germans' history can be difficult to place and categorize, as it poses specific challenges and enrichments to such larger discourses as those of the Holocaust and the African diaspora (2-4). Despite the interviews' foundation in oral history's methodology, Campt encounters these accounts not only as documents but more as "narrative texts" that are "symptomatic" (à la Ronald Grele à la Louis Althusser) and "problematic" (e.g., 9). Indeed, Campt theorizes the usefulness of examining mediated accounts of past experiences in light of the fact that "true" past perceptions are inaccessible, calling to mind Joan W. Scott's essay on "Experience," which Campt also cites elsewhere.

3 Campt identifies "race" as the key, fundamental element of National Socialist organization and authority and ponders a shift of focus, or a change of lens, to see not anti-Semitism per se but rather an "ideology of racial purity" as the basis of National Socialism

(5). A recurring theme of Campt's work here is the lack of unity in National Socialist policy as regards Black Germans. Depending on various factors like skin color and location, Black Germans like the two individuals interviewed for this volume experienced service in the Hitler Youth, obstruction of professional aspirations, and involuntary sterilization. Because of the "contradictory" methods with which the Nazis dealt with the Black German population, Campt draws the conclusion that race is the "foundational discourse that motivated [. . .] this regime but also paradoxically presented the ultimate impossibility of fully realizing a racial state" (5). Black Germans did not fit into the — indeed overtly challenged-National Socialist conception of "Germanness." These contradictions were readily apparent, however, as one sees in the case of Fasia Jansen, who, because of her racialized status, was forced to work in a concentration camp yet maintained a status as a German citizen, still superior to the regime's "abject" (149-150). In a country and larger political entity (now the European Union) whose identities have been principally, if not exclusively, constructed as "white," Black Germans oppose the notion that racial issues can be as easily delineated as some scholarship would have one believe (8). Campt observes that analysis of discursive continuities from Germany's colonial period, post World War I, and the Third Reich "underlines [. . .] continuities in the stakes and salience of a conception of national purity as racial purity" (7; emphasis added).

4 Campt employs gender in her analysis of her interviewees' experiences, but is somewhat unclear about the foundations of her terminology. From her study, one can see that her approach is social constructionist, and Campt explains the utility of feminist analysis in this case, as race and gender are affected/effected cooperatively, that is, mutually inextricable (21-22). Unfortunately, Campt does not closely define her ideas of gender, which would have been beneficial, for instance, in the book's introduction, in her analysis of Hans Hauck's experiences in the Hitler Youth (e.g., 111-112), and in other formulations: "not only did [National Socialism] work through race in its administration of individual lives but also, perhaps more revealingly, that race necessarily worked through gender and gender necessarily worked through race" (21-22).

5 The book is divided into an introduction or contextualization, two parts (each comprising a brief introduction and two chapters), and a final chapter or "postscript." Using primary and secondary sources, part I charts a somewhat latent German fear of "racial mixture" and, in its two chapters, treats two examples of events or contexts in German history in which this fear surfaced, namely the discourse of miscegenation and interracial marriages surrounding Germany's colonies and French occupation of the Rhineland and the discourse of sterilization of the so-called "Rhineland Bastards." Part II focuses on the interviews collected

for this study. Chapter 3 applies specifically to the account of a Black German man, Hauck, a son of a French occupying soldier, who participated in the Hitler Youth and the Wehrmacht, was a prisoner of war, and underwent involuntary sterilization. Chapter 4 addresses the interview with Jansen, a female Black German who, faced with the closure of the professional track she had been pursuing, became a cook at a concentration camp.

6 In the final chapter of the book, Campt tackles the complex of issues related to the themes addressed in this volume. She takes issue with common "blanket" applications of a diasporic paradigm to "all formations of Black community," an approach that seems to be often requisite (174). Indeed, Campt points out that there are tensions among Black communities that preclude a simple attribution of the "diaspora" label. In that vein, she aims to re-theorize a diasporic discourse that is "more often and quite profoundly about the dynamics of *difference*" instead of a universal similarity (169, original italics). Part of the uniqueness of her approach can be found in her efforts to theorize this *difference* as fundamental to the experiences of Black Germans and even to other African diasporic communities. Campt rightly takes issue with previous essentialist notions of African diasporic identity, which required an automatic and un(der)theorized identification with Africa and/or African Americans. Indeed, she wonders where Black Germans may fit in.

7 This noteworthy volume integrates many secondary sources, including extremely influential works in Holocaust studies, memory, and German history, and Campt connects her claims to the relevant scholarship. Campt's work arrives at a quite productive time in the studies of the experiences of Black Europeans. In addition to ongoing published work, conferences like "Challenging Europe: Black European Studies in the 21st Century" organized by the Black European Studies Project at the Johannes-Gutenberg-University in Mainz, Germany (2005) and "Remapping Black Germany: New Perspectives on Afro-German History, Politics, and Culture" (at which Campt was among the presenters) at the University of Massachusetts Amherst (2006) continue to assemble and encourage revolutionary work in this field.

List of Contributors

Hedwig Fraunhofer is an associate professor of German and French at Georgia College & State University (USA). She has published on Brecht's early dramatic work, as well as on Strindberg and gender. A comparatist by training, she is working on a book manuscript on fascism, gender and sexuality in modern European drama.

Martina Mittag teaches English and American literature and culture. She is the author of *Nationale Identitätsbestrebungen im englischen Pamphlet, 1558-1630* (1993) and *Gendered Spaces: Transformations of the Feminine in Early Modern Discourse* (2001) and numerous articles on gender in relation to scientific discourse, utopia, virtual reality. As a visiting scholar/professor she worked at UC Irvine, CA, Brandeis University and the University of Milwaukee, and has taught at the universities of Giessen, Paderborn and Saarbrücken in Germany. She is now working on a larger project on secrecy.

Fintan Walsh holds M.Phil. and Ph.D. degrees in Theatre, Performance and Film from the Samuel Beckett Centre, Trinity College, Dublin. His main research interests include queer theory, psychoanalysis and constructions of masculinity in contemporary drama, live art, film and television. Currently, he teaches courses in Critical Theory, Film and Theatre at the School of Drama, Film and Music at Trinity College.

Beauty Bragg

Kyle Frackman