

# Body

## From "Critical Terms for Art History"

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To the despisers of the body will I speak my word. . . . [S]oul is only a word for something about the body. The body is a big sagacity, a plurality with one sense, a war and a peace, a flock and a shepherd.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (translation modified)

Nietzsche's advice to "despisers of the body" suggests that the split between the body and the spirit or mind theorized in the work of Descartes three hundred years earlier was beginning to lose its privileged position in the logic of Western thought by the end of the nineteenth century. Telescoping back to Plato's notion of the body as the "exterior environment" for the soul (Plato 1987, 1165), Descartes's position was summed up in the well-known dictum in *Discours de la méthode* (1637), "I think therefore I am" ("**cogito ergo sum**," or "**je pense, donc je suis**"), which he followed by the statement, "the soul, by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body" (Descartes 1938, 86–87). The Cartesian separation of mind and body had been challenged from its first articulation, especially in the French philosophical tradition; thus, Julien Offray de la Mettrie, in his 1748 treatise *L'homme machine*, explicitly critiqued Cartesianism, theorizing a link between matter (the material body) and **esprit** (the mind, spirit, or soul)<sup>1</sup> and arguing that "the diverse states of the soul are always correlative with those of the body" (Mettrie 1961, 97). Nietzsche's proclamation, however, melodramatically relegated Cartesianism to the past, signaling the beginning of the end of its sway over Western conceptions of self. \*

The death of God, which Nietzsche also infamously proposed, pointed as well to the dissolution of the conceptual boundary differentiating body and mind. It was the belief in a singular outside deity that had afforded the mind a transcendent source of identification to project itself outward, as separate from and privileged in relation to the stinking, mortal, weighty flesh of the body. The body had, then, been viewed as pure animal, a vessel marking "Man's" immanence and mortality. Notably too, as Simone de Beauvoir pointed out in *The Second Sex*, her 1949 feminist critique of Cartesianism, the body was inexorably marked as feminine. In order for Man to aspire to godliness or its worldly corollaries cultural and social power, to leave immanence and femininity behind, the body had to be suppressed or transcended through pure thought.

Nietzsche's clear rejection of Cartesianism helped move Western thought toward an understanding of the body as inexorably enmeshed in the mind or soul and vice versa; the soul, "only a word for something about the body," could thus no longer be unproblematically imagined as transcendent or unbounded by corporeality and the desires and needs it presupposes. This essay is situated firmly within this latter post- or anti-Cartesian understanding of the body/self complex, expanded through an understanding of the person or subject as embodied and intersubjective: the subject as a body/self always contingent on others rather than full within itself. I will trace the body through several theoretical models for understanding the relationships between the body and the world, the body and the self, the self and the other, in order to explore the crucial relationship of embodiment to the making and interpreting of visual culture.

### Body Repressed

The body has held a crucial role in art and art history, as is made clear by its simultaneous obviousness and invisibility in these discourses (with discourse broadly construed as any mode of communication, making, or

debate, in this case, from art making to art-historical analysis). In order for Man to attain his highest role in identification with God, as logical rather than embodied being, Cartesian thought required that the body be transcended; in the twentieth-century terms of Sigmund Freud, the body had to be repressed or disavowed. Per de Beauvoir's insights, this requirement also entailed the exclusion of femininity—as well as other types of subject-identifications outside the white, male, Euro-American norm—in order to ensure the unification and self-containment of this subject Man. In Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thought Man, by expelling incoherence and otherness, could be imagined as a coherent origin of all knowledge, a new, more conceptual version of Leon Battista Alberti's equally disembodied fifteenth-century punctal viewer, staged as starting point for an all-encompassing perspectival gaze (see Olin, "Gaze," chapter 22 in this volume).

I have suggested that this attempted erasure of the body did not actually remove it from the situations of making and interpreting art. I argue here that by virtue of the very obsessive desire to eradicate the body it became a ubiquitous—if repressed—subtext for all Western philosophy, including aesthetics. However, it is crucial to stress that the foundational importance of the body as site of exchange between the self and the world did not prevent its successful repression in Cartesian thought. The Cartesian notion of a disembodied, disinterested, empowered subject had profound repercussions in art-historical discourse, where it was translated into the belief in a divinely inspired maker or interpreter of art. Art history, like aesthetics, was born out of the Enlightenment (see Preziosi, "Collecting/Museums," chapter 27 in this volume).

Specifically, in the discipline of art history and its related field of art criticism, the late eighteenth-century theories of Immanuel Kant were progressively simplified into models of aesthetic judgment that pushed Cartesianism to its logical extreme. Key to these models of aesthetic reasoning was the oversimplification of Kant's idea of "disinterestedness," which in Kant had accommodated (if awkwardly) the ambiguities and contradictions of positing judgments that are both "universal" (at least within Kant's worldview) and particular to individual subjects. Stripped of the ambiguities and complexities of Kant's model, "disinterestedness" in modernist art discourse was mobilized to ensure the possibility of an objective—disembodied, logical, "correct"—evaluation of the aesthetic value and meaning of artworks. Within this dominant strand of art discourse, which came to a climax in the post-World War II writings of Clement Greenberg, the critic informed by Kantian theory by definition had to veil or occlude his body in order to make purely logical aesthetic judgments free of the taint of "interest" (the messy vicissitudes of bodily desire).

Greenberg's theories must be understood within the trajectory of formalist criticism and the complex nexus of twentieth-century Euro-American political history. Roger Fry's formalism in early twentieth-century England, for example, called for a return to a kind of "primitive" relationship to pure form on the part of the artist, who needed to remain untainted by the corruptions of machine culture. In "From Primitivist Phylogeny to Formalist Ontogeny" (1998), Richard Shiff has convincingly argued that Fry was at least partly motivated in this conception by his anxious reaction to the rise of industrialism and its corollary destruction of the body's "natural," intimate connection with making. Fry's artisanal Omega Workshops thus aimed to restore the body to the process of artistic production.

Certainly Greenberg's formalism also reflected anxieties about the rise of "debased" commodity culture but, more specifically, was also closely linked to the rise of totalitarianism in Europe when he first began writing in the 1930s. The danger of totalitarian regimes' attempts to legislate a certain mode of social realism to suit their own propagandistic ends was acutely felt in U.S. culture from the 1930s through the 1950s, the period during which Greenberg honed his theories of high art. In particular, the idea of "free" or disinterested modes of creation and interpretation was aligned with broader political ideas circulating around the superiority of U.S.-style democracy during the 1950s.

Nonetheless, as many commentators on Greenberg's criticism have pointed out (see, for example, Harrison and Wood 1993), there is a certain authoritarianism in Greenberg's model of modernist formalism, in particular in the reliance of his criticism on an implicit notion of the critic gaining his authority from taking a stance of putative disinterestedness vis-à-vis the art object. In turn, this notion of an objective reading supports and is in turn supported by the idea that Greenberg's interpretations are necessarily "correct." Because disinterestedness requires the suppression of those bodily functions that would serve to point to the specificity of the critic's subjectivity and his openness to or desire for others, this aspect of Greenberg's model perpetuates the unspoken privilege of the white male subject in Western patriarchy. The insistence on

veiling or occluding the body and the role bodily desire plays in interpretation thus differentiates Greenberg from Fry inasmuch as the latter actively advocated a return to embodied modes of artistic creation.

For Greenberg and other formalist critics following his example (such as Michael Fried), however, an acknowledgment of the critic's embodiment would have been an acknowledgment of his immanence and contingency, putting the lie to his claims of transcendence and the putative godlike authority of his impassioned yet "objective" judgments. And a key corollary to this suppression of the interpreter's body was the erasure or avoidance of any acknowledgment of the body of the artist. For if the artist's body were to be taken account of, then the interpreter's body would inevitably be unveiled in relation to it. Interpretation would be marked clearly as determined through psychic and eminently embodied investments—not objective, disinterested, or otherwise authoritative.

In the most general sense, then, the body was repressed and became strategically invisible in art critical discourses informed by Kantian aesthetics. Greenberg's formalist model of art criticism thus denied the invested role of the interpreter in determining meaning and value, repressing the bodily engagement of viewer and artwork/artist, and extended the "art for art's sake" rhetoric of French romanticism and Roger Fry to insist that art remain completely autonomous from the social realm. Greenberg's rival critic of abstract expressionism, Harold Rosenberg, was another story: in his essays on abstract expressionist art, he drew heavily on existentialism, a French philosophical movement driven in part by the desire to overthrow Cartesianism and its erasure of the body and its relationship to the social. Rosenberg thus theorized a laboring, fully embodied artist in essays such as his famous "American Action Painters" of 1952. But Greenberg's theories became dominant in the United States and influential in Europe in the 1950s and 1960s.

Just as Greenberg's critical model, based on the fantasy of disembodied, objective art critical judgment, came to the apogee of its influence, however, counterdiscourses emerged to reassert the body as active aspect of the making and interpreting of visual art. Thus, even while Greenberg strategically sought to erase the body—for example, heroizing Jackson Pollock as bringing to perfection, with the drip paintings, the logic of formalist purity begun by the French modernists—artists were beginning more and more overtly to perform the body as a part of their work.

Ironically, however, Pollock had overtly **performed** the making of these paintings with his elaborately gesturing body, which was then photographed and filmed for posterity. The version of Pollock that has remained art-historically crucial for the present day is less Greenberg's Pollock, defined in relation to the pure logic of the push-and-pull surfaces of his drip paintings, than the figure of Pollock in action—apotheosized by Rosenberg in the "American Action Painters" essay and echoed further in the reinterpretations of Pollock by Allan Kaprow and other younger artists interested in performance. This Pollock is the performative Pollock, body straining and inexorably tied to the process of painting and its inevitably embodied, and so interested (invested, desiring), reception (see Jones 1998).

So we could argue that, while the body was made "absent" in dominant modernist art discourse, its inescapability was the crucial factor motivating the hurried and vehement pronouncements of disinterestedness on the part of critics such as Greenberg. And the body has become increasingly—and aggressively—visible within more recent practices and theories (since, say, around 1960) to the point where its obviousness, as a site of manipulation, identification, projection, and display, is just as problematic and conflicted as its previous occlusion. We have now begun to take the body for granted as a ubiquitous presence, an attitude just as limiting in its assumptions as earlier generations' insistence on ignoring or suppressing the role of the flesh in determining aesthetic meaning and value.

At this point I want to complicate both the body's earlier invisibility in modernism and its ubiquity in contemporary practice. Engaging a key image in the history of photography, I will point to the way in which representations of the body surface the most basic motivations behind our desire to make and look at visual images and objects. This reading will mark the body as continuous both with the world and the self, the body as a site across which artists and interpreters engage each other in acts of making meaning; it will explore these interpretive acts as themselves motivated by longing and an unfulfillable desire to ward off mortality. We will see that it is with the body that the conundrum of representation, the always failed desire to attain

immortality and transcendence, reveals itself most starkly.

Hippolyte Bayard, **Autoportrait en noyé (Self-portrait as a Drowned Man)** (1840).  
Photograph courtesy Société Française de Photographie, Paris.

### “Dead” Body

On 18 October 1840, Hippolyte Bayard presented a photograph of himself as a drowned man (**Plate 17.1**). On the back of the photograph, Bayard penned a third-person account of his supposed suicidal drowning as a result of J. L. M. Daguerre's having been credited by the French government with the invention of photography, even though Bayard had obtained some of the first positive images made from a negative and thus potentially reproducible (Lo Duca 1979, 19, 22–23). The text describes a body sadly “unclaimed” at the morgue, its darkened hands already “beginning to rot”; the image is often reproduced with the title **Autoportrait en noyé** (Self-portrait as a drowned man). Bayard's body is thus delivered up in its seemingly incontrovertible “realness” only simultaneously to put the lie, at this very beginning of photography, to this apparent truth value of photography. For, if Bayard had truly been drowned, how could he have fabricated this self-portrait? His body could not have been both places (in front of and behind, or at least guiding, the camera) and in both states (alive and dead) at the same time.

With this complex image, Bayard gets at something fundamental about the body in relation to the image, something that, indeed, provided the major impetus to the development of photographic technology: the desire for the image to render up the body **and thereby the self** in its fullness and truth.<sup>2</sup> As “index,” the photograph renders its objects through chemical traces that mimic the way in which light bounced off of or was absorbed by their contours when photographed. Being an indexical trace of the body before the camera, then, the photograph promised to return the represented body to some kind of authentic state. Because the photographic portrait documents the embodied trace of the self (with the mind made visible

only through its body-sign), it highlights both the inextricability of body and mind and the fact that we often access the self via its visible—corporeal—form, a form we want to serve as guarantor of the body. The photographic portrait seems to reaffirm the body's never-ending “thereness,” its refusal to disappear, its infinite capacity to render up the self in some incontrovertibly “real” way. \*

Bayard's image plays on another aspect of our attachment to bodies and images and thus points to the continuities between the two insofar as we want both body and image to “read” clearly as a “sign” for something else—the person or thing. We tend to interpret and experience others through their appearance; among other things, this is the basis of racism and other kinds of stereotyping. Cartesian or high-tech fantasies of transcending the body through pure thought, in more recent terms, via free-floating internet subjectivities, are extensions of this logic of the body **as** a kind of detachable image or sign for the self. However, as Bayard's facetious performance makes clear, the body may appear to be simply a sign of the self or a discardable shell but we also are compelled to turn to it as the physical enactment and guarantor of the self.

The self-portrait image points to a fundamental aspect of our desire to make and look at visual representations; it collapses our desire for the image to render up the body/self of the person depicted into our desire for the work of art to deliver the artist to us in some fashion, as coded in and through the work. The work of Jacques Derrida has explored the way in which our relationship to the image is driven by our desire to return it to its maker. In linking it back to its original source of intentionality we believe ourselves to be securing its one “true” meaning; again, this is, in part at least, motivated by our desire to read a subject in and through the work of art: to decipher a body in the image, or the image as a body. We are compelled to identify a body (and thus a self) with whom we can identify ourselves, onto whom we can project our innermost desires. And photography holds a special place in this field of desire: Jean-François Chevrier and Jean Sagne (1984) have noted that “just as the photograph reduces geographical distances, it reduces equally psychological distances. . . . By the infinite artifices of the *mise en scène* [of the portrait photograph], a technique traditionally devoted to the registering of facts becomes a means of projection” (47). In a sense, we relate to the image as a body in relation to our own: in spite of modernist formalism's attempts to erase its effects, the body has everything to do with meaning.

The photographic self-portrait in particular promises to convey the artist to us directly: the maker apparently becomes the subject/object depicted in the image, a subject who is, in turn, interpreted by us through processes of identification and/or of projection. While Pollock as an embodied subject continues to be “present” in his work through the gestural trace of paint and thus through the viewer's perception of his having moved in such and such a way to make such a trace, Bayard is “present” to us (albeit as a “corpse”) in a deceptively direct-seeming indexical self-rendition. The photographic portrait in general seems to bring its subject “to life”; in the case of the self-portrait, we may be tempted to feel we have unmediated access to the artist as origin of the work.

At the same time, as Bayard's image makes startlingly clear, the image—and perhaps especially the photograph, which freezes the subject at a past moment in time—is death. It is not surprising that the portrait in post-Renaissance Western art emerged at least in part from the tradition of the death mask: an even more obviously indexical imprint of the dead face of a lost subject (see Berger 1994, 90). Rather than giving us Bayard, the photographic portrait points to the impossibility of ever having or knowing him: it points to the limits of representation as well as the limits of interpretation and indeed of knowledge itself. The “that has been” quality of the photograph noted by photography theorist Roland Barthes signals the inexorability of the passage of time, which is marked most clearly via the photograph's documentation of the body in the past, differentiated from the now aged or dead body we experience in the present of interpretation.

Photography was developed at least partly out of the desire to forestall disappearance (death)—“the desire . . . to bring things ‘closer’ spatially and humanly . . . to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction” (Benjamin 1936, 223). But the individual photograph paradoxically points to a telescoping series of unfulfilled desires: our desire for, desire to know, desire to have, desire to make. We desire these things in order to make ourselves feel coherent, independent of others, and thus closer to transcendence and immortality. However, the photograph, documenting the “that has been,” also ultimately ends up indicating nothing other than our mortality.

In Bayard's photograph, his body is not only still (as it must be, given the mummifying property of the photographic gaze), it is shrouded in a mask of deathly whiteness, which seems to signal not only death but the beginnings of decay: the blood having left the surface of the body, it settles into resolute objecthood as a corpse—the hands, as Bayard himself noted, have already “begun to rot.” As a mask, the white sheen produces Bayard as a sign of death; paradoxically, he stages himself as the subject (author) of the picture as well as the lifeless object of a process of representation already, in 1840, understood to be death dealing.

### Body Origin/Body Interface

Our desire for/desire to know Bayard is compounded by our desire to situate a singular origin—not only for the work of art or photographic image, but also, in this instance, for photography itself. Bayard clearly understood the stakes involved in who would be named as the origin of photography. His fears have been borne out by the tendency even today to remember Daguerre and the daguerreotype while the name of Bayard remains almost completely forgotten; this is true even though the daguerreotype, a unique positive image on metal, is technically unrelated to the present-day technique of printing multiple pictures from a single negative, which is directly linked to Bayard's method.

With negative print photography a special irony is introduced into the search for origins, for the original subject of meaning; in this case, the origin of photography is the beginning of a discourse of reproduction, the point from which all copies blossom. (This point is made polemically since, of course, engravings and etchings and other modes of producing copies predated photography by centuries; nonetheless, one could argue that photography perfected the visual discourse of the copy; see Krauss 1981.) The origin of photography is a double paradox. While there can be no singular beginning, no single living or transcendent body, responsible for any discourse, this is particularly obvious in relation to the inauguration of the discourse of the copy (what theorists of post-modernism have called the discourse of simulation or of the simulacrum). Bayard's image and its textual frame, then, again return us to a profound paradox underlying our relationship to the image: that there is no “origin,” no original body/self securing the representation any more than the body itself can be viewed as a detachable sign of a preexisting self in the real.

Returning to death, Bayard's image seems to suggest that, through representation, the **corps** (the French word for body) is always already made a **corpse** through the inevitable process of representation whereby we experience one another simultaneously as subjects and objects; and yet it also points to the stubborn refusal of the body to be reduced to detachable sign. The body can't secure the subject as origin any more than it consigns the subject inevitably to objectification. The body **is** the paradox of the living and lived subject. On the one hand, we have seen that Cartesianism was precisely concerned with separating the mind from the body, with the latter conceived as some sort of inferior container; this concept extends the Platonic idea of a poor copy or secondary manifestation—a representation— of some “essential” self, which transcended the brute materiality of the body. On the other hand, the body seems resolutely resistant to representation: in its multidimensionality, weighty, sweaty, smelly, feeling and felt as well as seeing and seen, it seems irreducible to the image viewed, in a Platonic sense, as a second-degree manifestation of something else.

I have attempted to debunk the former view, but it is worth complicating the latter as well by referencing Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theories of embodiment, which scrutinize the specificity of the body's relationship to the mind or self and to other objects in the world (phenomenology is the philosophical movement that returns thought to embodied experience, understanding that meaning is constituted by embodied human experience or embodied human consciousness). For Merleau-Ponty, the body is never simply an object, but “a grouping of lived-through meanings.” The body is never simply a sign, either: “the body does not constantly express the modalities of existence in the way that stripes indicate rank, or a house-number a house: the sign here does not only convey its significance, it is filled with it” (Merleau-Ponty 1995, 153, 161).

The body, Merleau-Ponty is suggesting, is our point of interface with the world but it is not simply a container or surface; because of the sense organs, “bodily existence is never self-sufficient” and the body is the flesh that opens to others and to other objects. Whether our body or that of another, it is never fixed or simple in

its significance but always fully lived, in process, and contingent. Our body both makes us subjects and makes us objects for others. "Saying that I have a body is thus a way of saying that I can be seen as an object and that I try to be seen as a subject" (167); it is the latter, the trying to be seen as a subject, that Bayard's image so poignantly enacts but paradoxically, by posing him as the ultimate object: a corpse.

More recently, theorists such as Judith Butler have expanded this phenomenological model using the insights of feminism; not only is the body interrelated with the flesh of the world, a hinge or interface between us and our others as well as our environment, it is also "a projected phenomenon" and thus an effect of our psychic desires (the psyche being "that which constitutes the mode by which that body is given" while the body is "that without which no psychic operation can proceed" [Butler 1993, 17, 141–42]). As such, it is always gendered and sexed—and, I would add, raced, classed, and otherwise particularly marked and experienced—in ways that change continually in relation to the context of engagement. In this way, Bayard's "corpse" becomes a feminine remainder—an excluded other to the discourse of the "invention" of photography, projected as such both (intuitively) by Bayard himself and by his viewers, then and now. Its lack of life is its passivity and feminization, qualities that once again extend to the photograph as an object itself. Bayard's self-objectification indicates the way in which image making, and photography in particular, produces a projected "body" of otherness, an object/fetish that is inevitably circulated within the flows of commodity culture.

At one point Merleau-Ponty argues suggestively that the body is "to be compared, not to a physical object, but rather to a work of art," in its coextensivity with its appearance (with both, "the expression is indistinguishable from the thing expressed") and its nature as a "focal point of living meanings" rather than a fixed and static "function" of stable terms (Merleau-Ponty 1995, 150). In this way, we can see once again that it is through the body that the conundrum of representation reveals itself. We may want to read the body in the same way we interpret a work of art, reducing our anxiety in the face of its complexity and openness by determining a fixed and final meaning anchored by the subjectivity of the artist as its originating source. But in both cases, collapsed perhaps into the fantasy of the work of art **as** the artist's body, meaning slips away. There is no gap between "picture" and "real body" that we can fill with our desired meaning. The body and the work of art—like the photographic representation of the body, which conflates the two—reveal the impossibility of knowing, of cohering oneself as an Albertian/Cartesian fixed point of full knowledge in relation to the thing/body one observes.

Bayard's body, which is both living and dead, speaks to this impossibility. The image is so clearly **not** the body "itself." And yet, inevitably, via the psychic processes of identification, projection, and transference—the means by which subjects engage one another in the world—the image becomes a body and so a self. Where else, if not in the body/picture, would the self reside? Through identification, we link ourselves to Bayard, feeling the emotional pain, rendered physical through the bleak pallor of his "dead" body, which he himself experienced at being overlooked. Through projection, we press ourselves (our relationship to this loss) onto Bayard's situation. Through transference we give him the pain we feel while, at the same time, borrowing his. In a certain sense, we become the neglectful parent, the authority who can return his dignity to him through long-delayed recognition of his originary role in the development of photography.

We attach ourselves to pictures (of bodies) as indicators of subjects who live or lived in the world. Far from only a secondary copy, the picture "is" in this sense a "body" and, in turn, a self or subject. Louis Marin, in **Portrait of the King**, notes: "the first effect of representation in general: to do as if the other, the absent one, were here and the same . . . Thus the photograph of the deceased on the mantelpiece . . . ; [The second effect of representing] . . . is to show, to intensify, to duplicate a presence" (Marin 1988, 5). The picture is just as "tangible" and "corporeal" as a person living in the world—it's just tangible in a different way. To paraphrase Merleau-Ponty, the picture, like the body, is flesh of the world.

## Body Fetish

Bayard's self-portrait shows us the way in which all images (all works of art) act on one level as fetishistic replacements of the lost or absent body of the artist (in this case, literally also the subject of the image) and ultimately as fill-ins for an anchoring presence (what we used to call "God"). Thus, representation, Marin continues, is "the satisfaction of the desire for the absolute that animates the essence of all power" (Marin

1988, 7). A fetish, the image promises to palliate the viewer's anxieties about loss, specifically, in classic Freudian theory, the male viewer's fear of losing his penis, a fear instigated by his taking sight of the woman's "lacking" body (see Pietz, "Fetish," chapter 21 in this volume).

Walter Benjamin notes in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), his epochal study of the causes and effects of mechanical reproduction, that the photographic portrait fills a fetishistic, cultic role for the viewer, filling in for the lost aura of the "original" artwork or religious icon:

cult value does not give way without resistance. It retires into an ultimate retrenchment: the human countenance. It is no accident that the portrait was the focal point of early photography. The cult of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead, offers a last refuge for the cult value of the picture.

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Once again we see the photographic portrait filling in as "body" for the otherwise absent subject and, in this case, also replacing the lost aura of the "unique" work of art, an aura that owes its mystical power to its supposedly direct connection to the making subject.

Understanding the photograph as fetish allows us to emphasize its significance as a mode of commodification (see Wood, "Commodity," chapter 26 in this volume). Both body and picture can be, and ceaselessly are, commodified; each relies on the other for both its commodification (think flesh mags) and its resistance to the flow of capital. Hence the body, via the agency of the subject, stubbornly refuses conflation into a brute thing (as in uprisings of slaves and women), while the image clings to the body as that which gives it "depth" and thus separates it from pure simulation.

The photograph as body is both living (flesh) and dead (fetish); its status as fetish links it inexorably again back to death. For the fetish is, precisely, never living or interactive like the subject or individual who projects or fantasizes it but always only a sign frozen and still in the aggressive field of this viewer's gaze. And it is for this reason that feminists and postcolonial theorists have rightly worked to challenge the conventional fetishization of the bodies of women and people of color in Western culture: because it inevitably reduces these subjects to "dead" or passive objects of an active, willful gaze (see Olin, "Gaze," chapter 22 in this volume).

Film theorist Christian Metz has argued that the photograph is linked definitively to death precisely because of its fetishizing property, its status as both "body" and "representation." The photographic take is "an instantaneous abduction of the object out of the world into another world, into another kind of time"; it is "immediate and definitive, like death and like the constitution of the fetish in the unconscious." Photography is a "cut inside the referent," the scene in the world being photographed, severing a piece of the world into a fragment or part object (Metz 1985, 84). The photograph thus "castrates" the real, freezing the body depicted as an object of a viewing desire that is always already masculine, as in Freud's scenario of fetishization. Thus, in spite of the photograph's obvious promise of delivering the body of the artist, even the photographic self-portrait is also an inexorable sign of loss and absence. While surely the taking of the photograph was motivated by the desire to retrieve the past (the embodied life of the artist) and maintain it in the present, the photograph will always fail at this task.

It is this impossibility that stalks our relationship to visual images; just as Freud and, more complicatedly, his follower Jacques Lacan argued, it conditions all of our relationships to other people. We want others to fill in for the gaps and losses we feel within ourselves, to compensate for our failure precisely to be that coherent, originary subject proposed at the center of Alberti's and Descartes's models of vision and knowing. And yet, even as we endlessly grasp and grope, casting about with our visual field and projecting onto the image (which again becomes the body of the artist) this body/image always slips away. Bayard's self-portrait as a drowned man makes poignantly clear that the present moment is always instantaneously made past and the process of imaging, rather than delaying that passage of time, confirms it.

**Body Contingent**

Conventionally, images have been deployed as a means of forestalling death and performing the artist's and, by extension, the interpreter's coherence and transcendence. Nicholas Mirzoeff notes, "Representations of the body are one means of seeking to complete this inevitably disjunctured entity. . . . The coherence of the represented body is, however, constantly undermined by the very incompleteness these images seek to overcome" (Mirzoeff 1995, 21). Following through this latter recognition, artists working at the turn of the twenty-first century have performed or produced images of the body's incompleteness that negotiate the death-dealing capacity of representation and explore our desire to make and view pictures as a means of producing/projecting substitute bodies. Their works—consisting of body fragments (Louise Bourgeois, Annette Messager, René Stout, Mona Hatoum, Kiki Smith, Robert Gober, Lauren Lesko) or overtly constructed self-performative photographs (Hannah Wilke, Cindy Sherman, Laura Aguilar, Lyle Ashton-Harris)—enact this simultaneous life-giving and death-dealing property of visual representations, the production and reception of which pivot around the lost or occluded body.

Subverting the bodily disavowals and repressions of dominant modernism, Kiki Smith's molded body parts enact rather than disavow the loss both motivating and predicted by the process of imaging the subject; Cindy Sherman's reiterative self-performances expose rather than deny the incoherence of the self as "read" through the body. The work of both of these artists is characteristic of a turn toward a resurfacing of the body—but the body as contingent on the intersubjective exchanges of self and other of which art making and viewing are highly charged examples. Body parts and endless self-reiterations strategically constrain our access to the making subject and deflect or deflate our desire for a unified "artist" to emerge from the work. These practices highlight the body but in a way that complicates rather than simplifying our understanding of its profound centrality to our mode of making and viewing visual culture. In so doing, they refute the previous promise of art to deliver a very particular—inspired, brilliant, divinely inspired, or God-like—subject to the viewer.

Thinking about "body" has led us to think about representation on the most basic level: to ask what motivates our desire for pictures. We make and view representations of the body because on some level we want to secure the depths of being—but paradoxically by indicating or summing up the subject as a two-dimensional picture (or static sculptural form). In producing images we attempt to produce the self as unified, coherent, originary, and immortal: Bayard as the "origin" of photography, as secured by a photographic self-portrait multiple that claims him as such. The great paradox is that by doing so we mark both the interestedness of interpretation, the way in which our embodiment conditions our invested relationship to images as other "bodies," and perform and expose our own contingency and mortality as the basis of all representation.

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1. The French word "esprit" more aptly and succinctly sums up concepts that, in English, take at least three words: soul, mind, or spirit.

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2. While I focus in this essay on the two-dimensional picture, most of these points could be made equally strongly (though with different emphases) with other kinds of visual culture, including video, sculpture, installation, etc., especially as our relationship to the latter, three-dimensional media, is conditioned by our movement in space in relation to their parts (which become surrogate "bodies," as the minimalist artists and theorists understood). Alex Potts (1998) and I (Jones 1999) have both pointed out that the sculptural installation literalizes the understanding of the work as a kind of body (engaged by viewers via their embodied experience in relation to it).



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